Flight of the PEORIA BELLE

Compiled by
Norman R. Pickstone

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Flight of the "Peoria Belle"

Compiled by Norman R. Pickstone
Rivesville, West Virginia
December, 1990

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A friend is someone who will share your joys and sorrows, but a brother is one who will stand shoulder to shoulder with you on the field of battle. And so it is in that spirit that this booklet is dedicated:

To the memory of our brothers

Stanley "Jack" Martin Co Pilot

&

Gerald "Ox" Doll Tail Gunner

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Introduction

This is the story of the "Peoria Belle" and her crew. She was a standard World War II B-17. We were average young men from across the United States thrown together by the War. Impersonal forces brought us together, yet we became a team of professional airmen.

It is no secret that the Air Force has always maintained high minimal requirements for the selection of its manpower. Air crews need to possess some measure of mental ability. Physical requirements are also exacting. The long period of training prior to the plunge into combat tends to weed out those who are unfit psychologically and/or physically. Reflecting upon this selection, one easily recognizes that the men of our crew had roughly the same level of educational skills. With a little twist of fate, any of the crew's enlisted men could have been officers and vice versa.

Our crew was put together in Walla Walla, Washington by whatever mysterious process the Air Force employed in determining which particular ten men would form which particular crew. It did not take long for the members of our diverse group to learn to respect one another. This was especially important when we later moved into combat situations. It has been said that the bonds of common danger bind tightly; But the bonds of common respect and affection bind even more.

Once our crew had completed its States-side training, by unspoken agreement, the formal military discipline of the rule book was left behind. Most of the other crews felt the same. One could walk around an air base all day and never see anyone

salute anyone else. All this, of course, is unlike many Hoolywood stereotypes--but it worked! On the ground, we were ten friends dedicated to the propposition of a happy return home for all. In the air, however, the pilot was the commander. Everyone did his job to the best of his ability.

The camaraderie and friendship we developed have lasted nearly fifty years since we trained for combat and were sent to Europe. We were deployed at Debach, England near the city of Ipswich (Suffolk). We quite soon became part of the 860th Squadron, 493rd Bombardment Group (H), 93rd Wing, 3rd Air Division, Eighth Air Force. We were a replacement crew in the 493rd ("Helton's Hellcats", Col. Robert B. Landry as the Group Commander). The Eighth Air Force, as part of the U.S.A.A.F., had been activated on January 28, 1942 for use in Europe against the Nazi war machine. The famed Eighth flew its first heavy bomber raid in August of 1942. During the War, the Eighth Air Force became the greatest air power in the world. The Eighth Air Force consisted of three air divisions. Divisions were made up of wings. Wings consisted of groups. Groups contained squadrons. Our story is about but one plane and her crew.

Reflecting on how we were organized and trained as a crew, we see time has only increased the bonds which turned perfect strangers into ten life-long friends. As time dims individual memories, it is incumbent upon us of the older generation to leave a written record of our story for the future. We all have our memories of our younger days--when we volunteered to fly combat and to do our part in bringing the War to a victorious conclusion. We are now struck by the strange combination of care-free happy days with the dangerous and nerve-racking missions deep within enemy territory. It was such an odd mixture of humor and fear, of pleasure and terror, and of pride and deprivation.

The most striking impression is the seeming normality of it all. We flew a standard B-17; we were a standard crew, but how high the standards were! We were ordinary men participating in extra-ordinary events. We never questioned the justice of our cause. America was united as never before. Courage, patriotism, and devotion to duty were accepted as common virtues.

The narration of events related in this booklet was supplied by the crew members of the "Peoria Belle", by Ruth Martin, widow of Stanley "Jack" Martin (Co-Pilot), and by Rita Doll, widow of Gerald Doll (Tail-Gunner).

I. Walla Walla

Our flight-crew training at Walla Walla was a transitional training which included 223 hours of flying in a little over two months. This was the last of our formal military training before the final shift to combat status. This training period was a very busy time. We had to be prepared to fly day or night. We had not only flight training but also specialized ground training in our individual positions. Physical training was not neglected but we were spared extra duties and make-work details. Time off was kept to a minimum. Norman Pickstone ("Pick"), our flight engineer, recalls only one three-day pass the entire time we were at Walla Walla. That was granted only near the end of the training period. At first, many felt that much of the training was designed to just occupy one's time. Later in combat, it was realized how vital it had all been.

Robert Gaustad ("Gus"), our navigator, says that he was "immediately happy with the make-up of the crew". The crew in fact

"soon slid into a comfortable relationship". At Walla Walla, our crew won the distinction of being one of the three best crews there at the time. (See Appendix 1.) Lt. Munday wrote that this award spoke well of his men: "This paid tribute to the fact that we became extremely well-disciplined as a unit for one purpose--- to do our jobs as best we could". He also wrote that "In Walla Walla, Washington, we became a unit of flying personnel, each with his own responsibilities to be carried out when we were in the air. While on the ground we became friends without any feeling of rank".

Other incidents at Walla Walla also reveal our crew to be alert and well trained. Once during a preflight check for a night take-off, Norman Pickstone, our flight engineer, noticed excessive smoke coming from #3 engine. He insisted that the engine's cowling be pulled; the ground crew complained. The crew chief of the ground crew told us that we had nothing to worry about as we would soon be flying planes in worse shape once we got overseas. Pick then demanded that the engine be inspected. It was soon discovered that there was a hole in a rocker box cover. It would have been disastrous to have taken off in that condition. Each of us truly did depend upon everyone else doing his job.

Flight engineer Pickstone's memories of Walla Walla include the day when our crew shot thirteen touch-and-go landings. It was a very thorough training course. During night flights, Pick remembers Gene Coughlin, a gunner, singing such songs as "Old Man River", "The Desert Song", and the like. Adlai would answer back by singing some song as "It's a Treat to Beat Your Feet in the Mississippi Mud". Pick also says that he still remembers the

sweet aroma of Jack's pipe that he would so often smoke. These were all comforting factors for the younger members of the crew; everyone felt that the pilot and the co-pilot had everything well in hand.

Among these memories of a strictly military nature are some events of a highly personal sort, e.g., the wedding of our pilot, Adlai Munday, to Dorothy Rodenhouser. She had travelled with her mother from Galesburg, Illinois. The wedding was held in the First Christian Church on September 14, 1944. Ruth Martin, the wife of Jack Martin, still remembers how hard it was for married couples to find housing in Walla Walla; she vividly recalls living in an apartment infested with bedbugs. After the crew was deployed, Ruth and two girlfriends made the trip home to wait for their husbands.

From Walla Walla the crew was sent in October of 1944 to Hamilton Field, California. Trained on B-24s, we had always felt that we were slated for the Pacific Theater. Little did we know that our fate would be quite different. We soon found ourselves on a troop train bound for the East Coast and for Europe. Officers and enlisted men travelled in separate compartments. But the members of our crew saw each other often on this trip.

At first whenever we stopped, civilians would board the train and sell the troops sandwiches and liquor. After we got to Chicago, such boardings ceased. Pick remembers going through Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania which is near his hometown. He had told the rest of the crew that Pittsburgh was a great city. Norm says, "I remember the mills and the factories going full-blast—— smoke and dirt everywhere. The troop train stopped for awhile. When we left the station, we looked like my Dad coming home from the coalmine with all that dirt on us and on our clothing." The crew never let him live that down.

Travelling on a troop train across country was no pleasure tour. Yet we made the best of it. Many of us were seeing parts of the country we had never seen before. On the train there also was a kitchen where the meals

were prepared. Norm volunteered to work in the kitchen. He was able to sneak food to the rest of the crew. "We were told that this was strictly forbidden. But tell a G.I. that he can not do something and he will show you that he can."

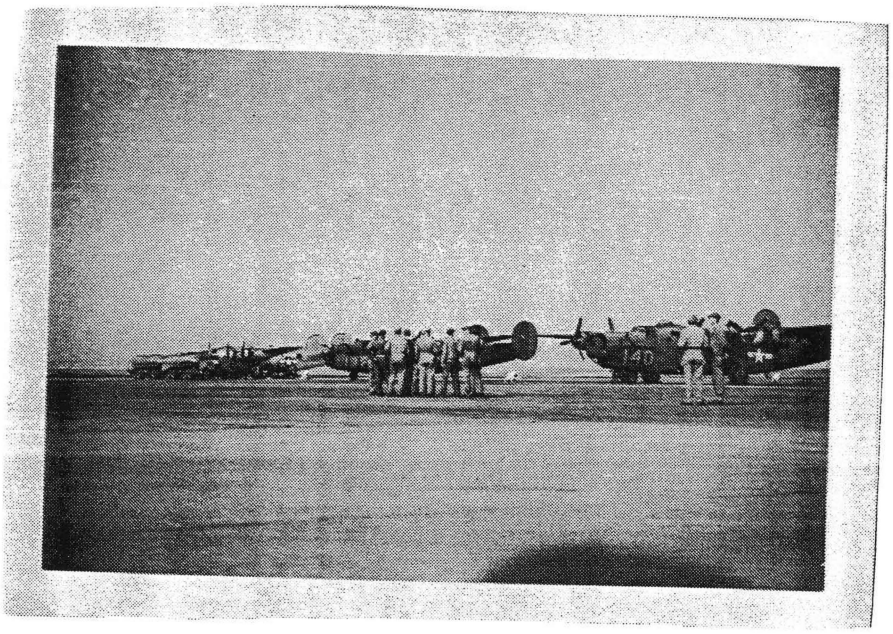
We arrived at Camp Kilmer en route to our shipping point in New York City. Pick recalls that at Camp Kilmer we made our final preparations before going overseas. Most of the time we were restricted to camp. Pick became very upset when he noticed that Italian P-O-Ws were apparently walking out of camp at will and crossing the main highway. "I was disgusted that they could leave and we could not. Then I learned that they were quartered in another part of the camp, just across the highway. I thought until then that they were going to town."

At Camp Kilmer, Norm purchased a stuffed dog in the Camp PX on November 11, 1944 for $1.50. The dog was given the name Two-Rad which is a term used by gunners. Norm took the dog overseas with us and on every mission we flew. Two-Rad became our mascot and our good-luck charm.

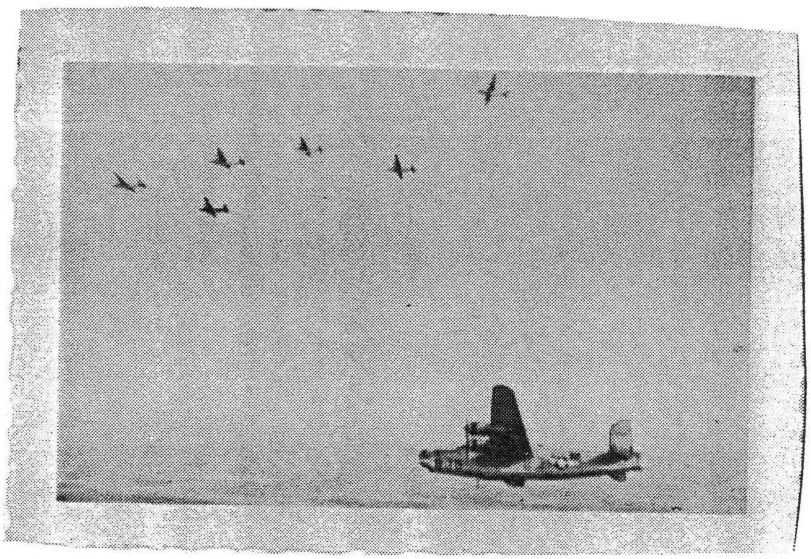
We were ready now for whatever fate was in store for us. We were professionally trained and happy to be with this particular crew. What our ultimate destiny would be we did not know. We were, however, willing to do our duty as best we could. We were starting on a great adventure with a strange mixture of excitement and concern.

Table of our crew members at the time of our deployment:

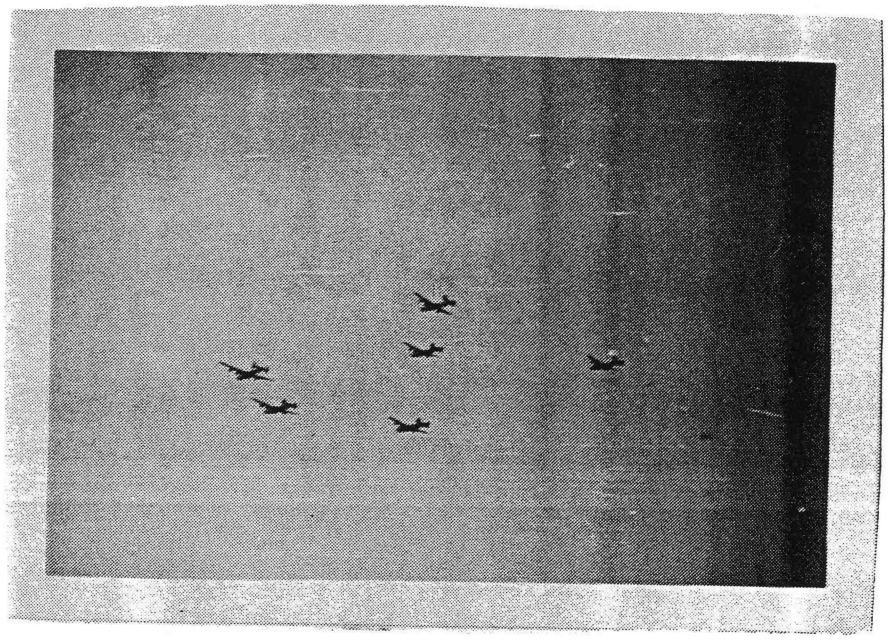
Name	Position	Home State	Nickname	Age (1944)
Adlai Munday	Pilot	Illinois	(Ole Dad)	24
Stanley Martin	Co-Pilot	Missouri	Jack or Smiling Jack	23
Robert Gaustad	Navigator	Texas	Gus	26
Carlyle Bradbury	Bombardier	Oregon	Brad or Porky	25
Norman Pickstone	Flight Engineer & Top-turret Gunner	Pennsylvania	Pick	20
William Stepp	Radio Operator & Waist Gunner	West Virginia	Snuffy	19
Lewis Stead	Ball-turret Gunner	Massachusetts	Lew	22
Robert Sumnicht	Waist Gunner	Wisconsin	Nose	19
Eugene Coughlin	Nose-Gunner & Togalier	Minnesota	Gene or Pop	26
Gerald Doll	Tail Gunner	Kansas	Ox	19



#1 Flight Line at Walla Walla. Our crew is in the middle.

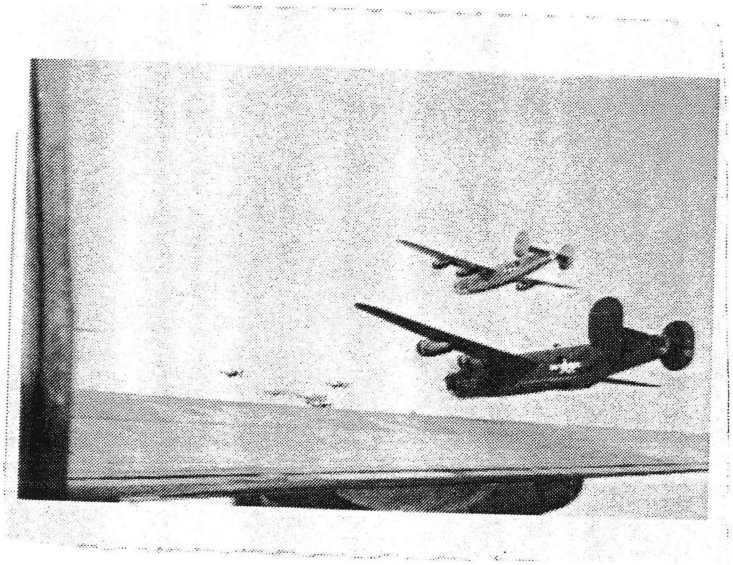


#2 B-24s over Walla Walla area.



#3 Formation of B-24s (Walla Walla)

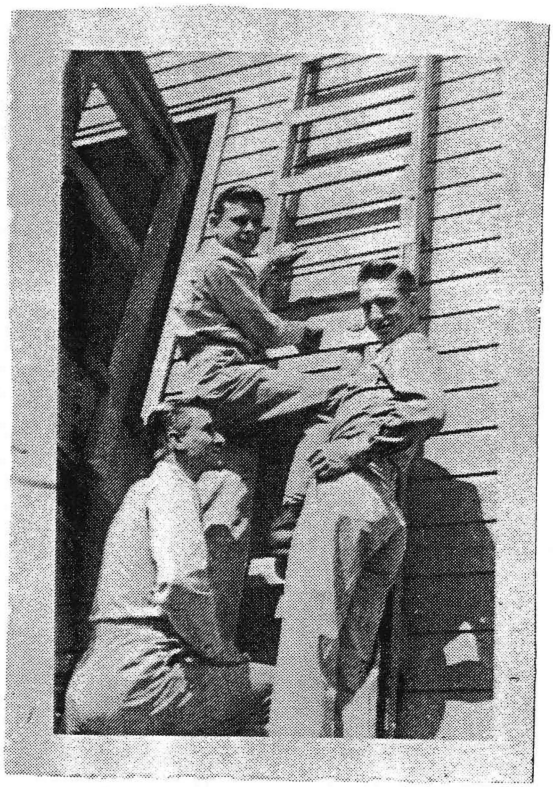
#4 Photo taken from B-24 in flight.



#5 B-24s in flight (Walla Walla).

#6 Walla Walla from the air.

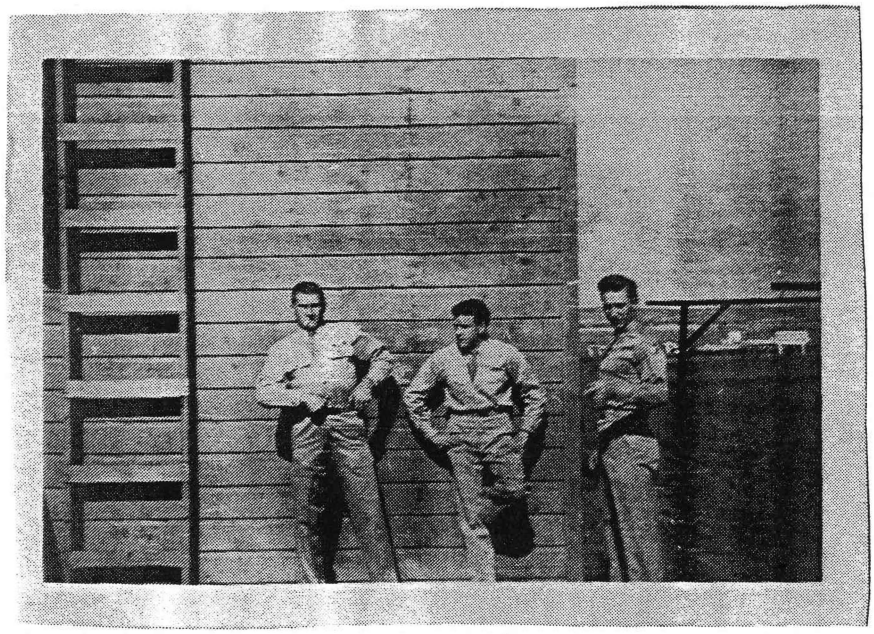
#7 Lew Stead (left) and Gene Coughlin (right).



#8 Bill Stepp (top), Bob Sumnicht (middle), Gerald Doll (bottom)

#9 Jack Martin

#10 Lew Stead (Oklahoma City, 1943)



#11 (left to right): Gerald Doll, Bill Stepp, Bob Sumnicht

#12 Norman Pickstone in the waist of the aircraft.

#13 Two-Rad, our mascot.

II. Life in Britain

Military service is always an odd mixture of adventure, boredom, fun, discomfort, and in combat situations, pure fright. Our crew embarked at New York City on November 15, 1944. We sailed on the British liner "Aquitania", a sister ship of the "Lusitania". During World War I, the "Aquitania" had served as a troop carrier for the ill-fated Gallilopi Campaign. During our embarkation a member of an infantry unit was forced to board the ship by his buddies. He kept yelling, "No one over there has done anything to me. And I don't want anything that is over there. I'm not going!" To this his friends replied, "The hell you're not!" They threw him on board the ship. None of our air crew had any contact with him during the voyage. To this day, we occasionally wonder how long it took that guy to realize that war is not such a personal affair.

We sailed alone, without a convoy. The voyage itself was fortunately quite peaceful; we made port on Thanksgiving Day at Greenock, Scotland. We landed during a blackout and were ordered into a truck. As school boys, we had learned that Britain was a land of castles and knights, a land of chivalrous adventure. Yet we were being pitched about in the dark and then sent tromping off in the mud. We went by train to Stone, England and then onto another base before being sent to Debach.

While at the replacement depot at Stone, Pick was able to get in touch with his brother Bill, a corporal in a U.S. infantry unit stationed in Britain. Norm's brother Arch had previously gotten shoreleave in England and thus he already knew where he could contact his brother. Bill's unit was a very strictly disciplined group. Pick to this day claims that his brother's unit was required to sleep at attention. Bill for his part could not believe how well our air crew got along with one another: both officers and enlisted men joked around and just plain enjoyed relaxing with each other. After the War,

Bill would often comment on what a great group of guys his younger brother had served with during the War. Bill would say: "I never saw a group of guys so devoted to each other." Others noticed as true friendship what we took for granted. One must always remember that this friendship only enhanced the crew's ability to perform its duties. Air discipline and military respect was never in doubt. As Pick has said: "Even today after nearly fifty years have passed, I can easily speak of Snuffy, Gus, Brad, and Jack. I can readily talk about Pop, Lew, and Nose. Yet it is rather strange to speak of Adlai because he is still Lieutenant Munday to me." The crew never lost respect for its leader, the one that they most credit with their successful survival.

Living conditions at Debach were not that bad. All American servicemen know the Quonset hut---one's home away from home. Yes, the Quonset hut---something made of metal and concrete, shaped liked a thirty-foot section railroad tunnel. It was so designed to offer some protection from exploding bombs. It was almost invulnerable to fire. The hut was equipped with cot-like beds. In the center of the room was one wood-burning stove. When we could get it, we even used coke to heat the huts. Britain seemed much colder than the United States. Many of us never felt warm the entire length of our tour in Europe. The huts also had a meager assortment of shelves and racks. There was a bare concrete floor. Two officer crews (eight men) were assigned to a hut or perhaps a dozen NCOs would share a hut. The communal latrine which was unheated would be a couple of hundred yards away. It was not luxury living but it was not life in a foxhole or in a trench either. It was often so cold that we would sleep in our

sheep-skin suits and would wear our boots to bed. All our crew members mingled back and forth between the huts. Much time was spent in poker games and in general bull-sessions. If a guy received a package from home, a crowd was sure to gather.

Among the most important aspects of an airman's life were the quality of food, the use of free time, and the arrival of mail from home. Mess-hall food was more than adequate, sometimes even pretty good. Of course, griping about G.I. food is an accepted military way of filling in those dead hours of boredom. There were also the service clubs. Our crew's officers and enlisted men would take the other ranks into the various clubs claiming that they were long-lost "cousins" in need of a drink. Reading materials were available including the English newspapers which were generally only four pages because of wartime shortages. These papers would consist of one large sheet of paper printed on both sides and then folded once. But it was surprising how much information was offered on those four sheets. Half of the news would be war related. An overseas version of "Time" magazine was also available. It was reduced in size and in the number of pages.

The military publication "Stars and Stripes" was somewhat larger. Besides the front-page news, personal-interest stuff, cartoons, and back-home items were offered. Sometimes the news was unwelcome however. For example, Pick once was reading an edition of "Stars and Stripes" when he found an article on the B-17 christened the "Rose of York". The plane had been christened by Princess Elizabeth (now H.M. Queen Elizabeth II). Norm was surprised to find his high-school friend Silvio listed among the crew. Norman decided that he would seek out his good friend as soon as possible. But upon reading the article further, he discovered that the plane had been lost in the North Sea and that his friend was dead.

A BBC reporter had also been aboard the "Rose of York" and had been lost as well. This incident only reinforced the superstition than an airman should never fly with another crew or allow a non-airman to fly with him.

Mail was a major concern. The airman sent his letter home free of charge as they were classified as V-mail. The letters from home were not censored but the airman's letters would be heavily censored if sent through channels. Our crew's officers censored our mail and thus sped up its arrival home. Norm recalls an incident relating to sending news home. Norm had gotten a three-day pass while at Camp Kilmer before the crew had sailed. It had taken such a long time to reach his home in Western Pennsylvania that he had only spent a few hours with his family. As he already had two brothers deployed overseas, Norm had decided not to worry his parents with the details of his mission. Later in England, after he had completed his first five combat missions, he asked a fellow flight-engineer who was returning to the United States to write to Norm's folks and to tell them that he was okay. The man did so, but he also wrote them that Norm had completed those first five missions and probably even more by the time the letter had arrived. Norm's parents had only known that their son was a gunner with the Eighth Air Force somewhere in Europe. Now they began to follow the news even more intensely when mention was made of the daylight bombings of Germany. The casuality reports were of greater concern. Norm would thus say, "At the time, I soon regretted having the letter written home and worrying my Mother even more."

Military life is often quite boring, with its rigid routine and often hours of idle time. Boredom can thus lead to some pretty funny stunts, ways to relieve the tension. Thus airmen who had completed a tour of combat missions would be made official members of the "Lucky Bastards' Club". There were also other such official groups of selected airmen. Those

airmen who had had to bail out of their planes, i.e., hit the silk, were made members of the official "Caterpillar Club". Members of our own crew would also do funny things to pass the time. Once during a rainy night at Base, Gene Coughlin decided to play a joke on the officers' hut. Coughlin dressed in a green raincoat and put on a German helmet. He then went over to the officers' quarters. Coughlin rushed in and while giving the Nazi salute yelled, "Achtung! Heil Hitler!" Unfortunately this is when the fun ended. Lt. Ray Meyers (pilot) and Lt. Albert Stewart (bombardier) were in the hut along with Jack and Adlai. Meyers had just finished cleaning his service pistol. He was so startled by a "German's" appearance that he immediately threw a clip into his weapon and pointed it at Coughlin's head. He then recognized Gene and said, "Fellow, you almost got yourself killed!" Gene backed out of the room without saying another word and with saucer eyes left. Years later, while visiting Adlai's home in Iowa, Ray Meyers made a videotaped message for Gene recalling this incident. It seemed very funny in hindsight, but at the time the humor got lost in the shuffle.

Gene Coughlin was the oldest man on our crew. He was all of twenty-six years of age in the fall of November 1944. That is why we would call him "Pop". He was such a great singer that many civilian groups would call upon him to perform. Wherever he went, Gene took some of the crew with him. Whenever asked if the rest of us liked to sing, Pop would say, "No, they like to eat! You fellows put on a pretty good feed and if you want me to sing you have to feed my guys." That is the kind of guy Gene was and in fact still is. During the War, we could only respect Gene Coughlin the more after he was offered a position as a singer with the Special Services and refused to leave the crew. After these many years, various crew members still fondly remember how Gene had been offered this "soft" job with honor.

Pop said that he would only be interested after he had finished his combat tour of duty. "How could I live with myself if I did a thing like that?" He could have honorably walked away from the dangers of combat and did not.

But life in Britain included much more than the G.I. life of an air base. We will never forget the British people themselves. Not only the British Tommies, but the civilians as well. It is always fashionable to gripe about the foreign country in which a soldier may be stationed. Yet we find it difficult to find fault with the British people. Sure, it was cold and it was wet. There was the ever-present shortage of fuel. The blackouts were gloomy and depressing. Yet the British themselves were more than tolerant of our Yankee presence.

Since Britain is a small but very heavily populated country, most air bases were located near civilian population centers. Since the bases were deliberately engineered in a sprawling fashion to allow for aircraft dispersal as a protection against enemy attack, several farms would often be encompassed by a base. Somehow this worked out. The cows, the pigs, and the farmers came to live in harmony with the loud foreigners and the general disruption of normal civilian life.

Flight crews in Britain got some breaks unavailable to other servicemen. We would often visit such English towns as Bury St. Edmunds, Cambridge, Petersborough, and Ipswich. Thus we got to know the average Briton better than many G.I.s. We also learned more about our own crew. Once while visiting Rugby, Lew mentioned that he had been born in Rugby and that he had migrated to the U.S. as a child. After that we began calling him "Limey Lew". But the

biggest break we enjoyed was the fact that flight crews every three weeks were granted leave in London. We would usually split into pairs or into groups of three. Then it was off on a three or four hour train ride to London.

In the city, somehow there would be public rooms available to paying guests. One might get a room in a four or five-story building half destroyed by a bombing. There would be running water and a bathroom down the hall. It was not the Waldorf-Astoria, but it was okay. Forget leg of lamb or roast beef. We would go into the city and scrounge up some newspaper-wrapped fish-and-chips. Base chow was much better, but this was all high adventure to us. Once we read a newspaper advertisement about the availablity of horsemeat at a certain London restaurant. We made the trip to town just to try that horsemeat.

By late 1944, the Luftwaffe was too weakened to mount major air attacks on Britain. But the Germans had plenty of "V weapons". The V-1 was essentially a drone launched from German-occupied bases on the Continent. It was designed to run out of fuel over London. With its distinct putt-putt sound, it was heard over London around the clock. V-1s came in at low level and could often be destroyed by anti-aircraft fire or by fighters. Yet many did get through. Many people were killed by these weapons and much property was destroyed. The weapons would keep the populace awake at night and they necessitated a large-scale civilian defence force.

The V-2 was a second of these German "miracle weapons". It was an effective weapon. The V-2 was a true rocket, launched primarily from German bases in the Low Countries. A V-2 would

arrive without warning and without the opportunity for defensive measures. The locals dubbed the V-2 the "Blockbuster". From our air base, on those few dawns when the sky was clear, one could see the exhaust trails of the V-2s being launched from occupied Holland over a hundred miles away across the North Sea.

While staying in London, one could be awakened at anytime by the blasts of the V-weapons and the attending sirens, rescue units, and ambulances. We would simply go back to sleep. The odds of getting hit were rather small. Still the cumulative effect of years of air assault had left London with hardly a block untouched by bomb damage. Still the city remained a magnificent place during this chaotic time. Piccadilly Circus was a mass of people, pubs, night clubs, taxis, busses, drunks, vendors, and hustlers. We all made our visits to Buckingham Palace, Big Ben, Number 10 Downing Street, Westminister, and St. Paul's. But sadly we spent little time on cultural enrichment. Many G.I.s embarked on a policy of bartender enrichment instead. The city seemed alive with G.I.s. The locals accepted it all with an air of resignation. Crime did not seem to be a major problem either.

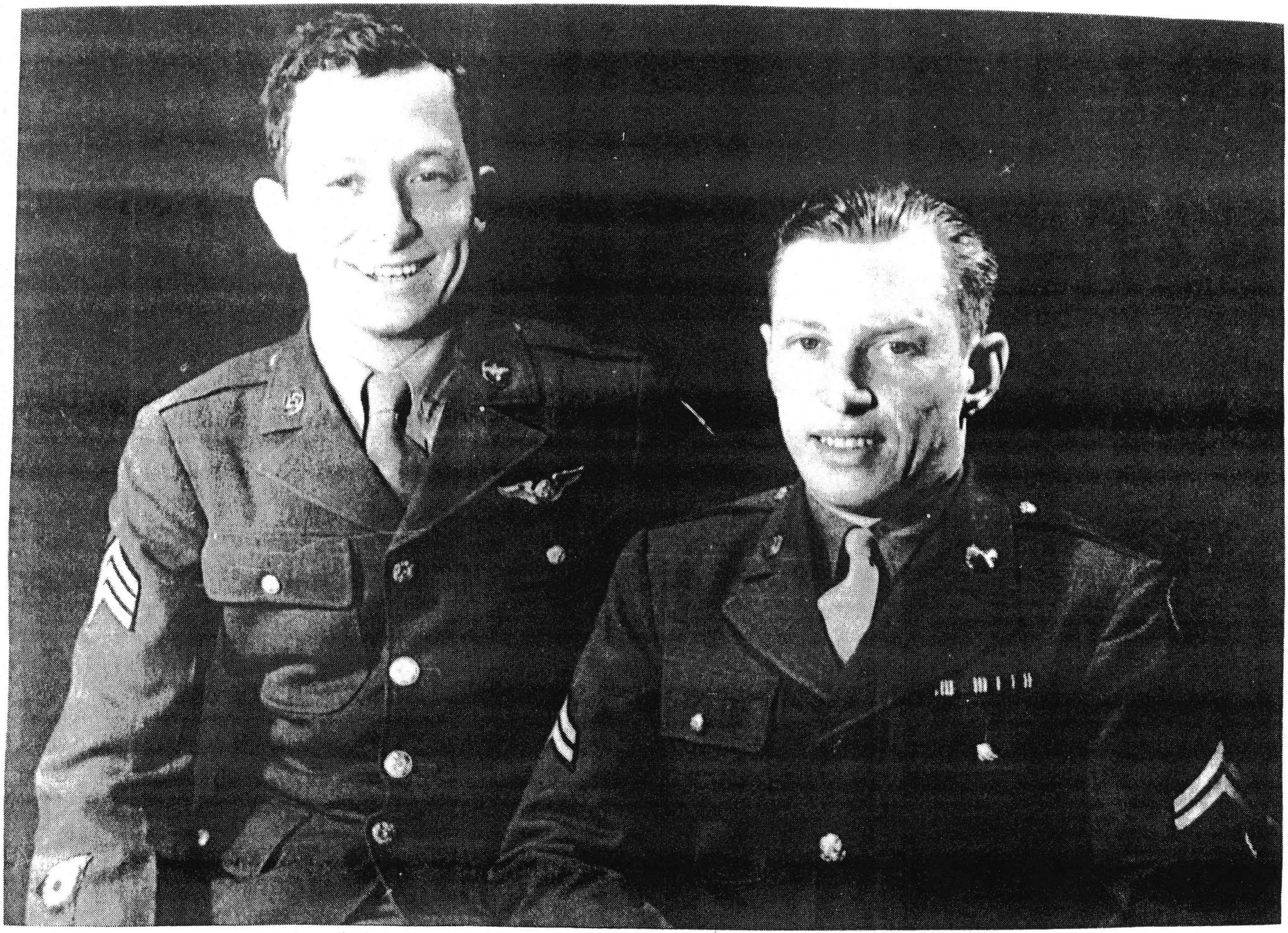
Relations with the Britons saw an occasional difference of opinion, often comical differences in lifestyles. Once members of the crew did witness that rare clash between the G.I. and the Tommy. While in a London pub, a British soldier made a crude ethnic joke that a Yank took exception to. It turned into a real riot. On another occasion in London, Lew, Jack, and Gene were discussing the relative differences between the British and the American peoples. Lew said that if one treated the British with kindness that they would reciprocate. Gene however said that he believed the American people to be much friendlier. Lew then saw a sweet little old lady coming up the street. To prove his point to Gene, Lew said that this was an opportunity to demonstrate English kindness. Lew then approached the elderly lady and said, "Good morning, madame. How are

you this fine day?" To this the lady replied, "Mind your own business, you damned Yank!" At that she quickly left the scene. Gene was roaring with laughter. Lew was left wondering how he had been so lucky to have chosen that particular old lady from the crowd.

Gus however has a recollection of a much better sample of British kindness. Gus writes: "After I survived a plane crash near our Base I made it to a farmhouse where a lady and her teenage son urged me to come in for a cup of tea---the ultimate British panacea. I had to decline because I was in considerable pain, and now I will never know if a cup of tea was the proper balm for severe burns. But the teenage boy, wearing bedroom slippers, came out in the snow and started walking with me in the direction of the Base until a rescue jeep showed up."

There was more than this general feeling of goodwill between the British and the G.I.s. There were also some very personal bonds. This was best illustrated by local townspeople in Debach showing such concern and relief when we safely returned to Base after being down on the Continent. It was very touching as the locals felt for us not as allies, but as individuals and as friends.

Gus has an even more telling memory of the British people: "On V-E Day, May 8, 1945, I recall a neat and flowered-bordered farmhouse not far from my hut. In front of this house a small American flag was displayed, along with a large sign which read: 'THANK YOU, AMERICA!' I was moved to tears."



#14 Photo of Norman Pickstone (left) and his brother Bill. (Photo taken in Britain).

III. B-17

When we arrived at Debach, we learned that we were to fly a B-17 rather than a B-24. As Lt. Munday wrote: "We were surprised to learn that we had been assigned to a Bomb Group who were flying B-17s. We were sure somebody had made a big mistake." Our pilot had had no experience flying a Fortress, but our co-pilot had some. Two nights after our arrival, Munday was acquainted with the B-17 checklist. Standard procedure was for the pilot to fly his first mission as a co-pilot with an experienced crew. In this way, he would complete a training mission and acquire some combat experience. His own crew would benefit from their pilot's seasoning.

Since our pilot was from Peoria, Illinois and our ground crew-chief had a girlfriend named Belle, the crew selected the name "Peoria Belle" for the aircraft that they were eventually assigned. The name used for identification purposes during radio transmissions was "Shumer D-Dog". This was our call name. Shumer signified our squadron; the term D-Dog specified the plane itself. Our tail number was 48610.

We were soon very glad that we had been switched to a Flying Fortress. As Bill Stepp has written: "The crew liked the B-17 because we believed it was a safer ship than the B-24. Take off and landing speeds were less than the B-24. It was not as big and it would glide better in case of emergency." The B-24 had better engines yet the B-17 could fly higher.

The B-17 will be forever the symbol of U.S. air power during the Second World War. The Flying Fortress was worthy of its name. It was equipped with defensive firepower from nine different positions. It was highly innovative for the time. Its high-tech was top notch in those days; but impregnable it was not. The Germans came up with effective fighter defenses and efficient anti-aircraft batteries. These gave the B-17 a pretty good working-over. Any heavy bomber is slow and cumbersome when compared with a fighter. It is true that

groups of B-17s with their combined capabilities shot down many enemy fighters, but the unquestioned technical advantage was with the fighters. Only in the last year of the War did we acquire sufficient long-range fighter escorts to make daylight long-range bombing into the Reich yield acceptable losses.

The great fleets of B-17s with their long white vapor trails were awesome spectacles. On such stuff Hollywood movies thrive. The sight of the vapor trails is in fact an indication that the planes were at high altitude and thus likely were operating in enemy airspace. The glamour begs description. In those days there were no such things as heated or pressurized aircraft. At 30,000 feet, it becomes incredibly cold. Though we had electric flying suits they were big and bulky. They were very cumbersome and negated efficient movement. Missions could last ten hours or more. These suits plugged into sockets on the aircraft.

High over hostile territory, oxygen masks were absolutely essential. We wore them for hours at a time. Throat mikes and hand-signals served as our communication system. The noise level was such that one could not talk to the guy a foot away without the throat mike. There were the flak jackets, very heavy and very uncomfortable. We had our Mae-West life-jackets in case we ditched in the North Sea. Finally there was a parachute harness which was worn at all times. A clip-on parachute package was ever at hand. Relief tubes were available on the plane, but at altitude it had to be a real class A emergency for a guy to use them. This was certainly a situation high on the Discomfort Index. The guy in the ball-turret was even more confined. We all looked liked critical care patients, but we still had our jobs to perform. And perform them we did——so did the Germans.

We had the most basic navigational tools to work with on a B-17: compasses, sextants, maps, radio, radar, etc. The navigator had a "desk" the size of a carving board. There was a device designated the E6b computer.

It was irreverently termed the E6b "confuser" by all the navigators. It was a hand-held system of concentric rings on a stiff backing. It was designed to calculate the true track and the ground speed of the plane. Wind changes, rough weather, and mechanical malfunction were the problems to be dealt with in the air. Any visual landmarks were of value. Gus had many hours of celestial-navigational training, but never used any on combat missions.

This was the era of primitive electronics. In the last year of the War, the British developed a navigational aid called a G Box. It was six inches square with a monitoring screen on one side. But it was effective only within a fifty-mile radius. Within that zone, the navigator could make course corrections to the Base with the aid of the G Box.

In the end, the skill of the pilot and the co-pilot was the deciding factor between success and failure. For example, one can report an incident that occurred right after our arrival at Debach and before the crew had even flown a combat mission. One night, Adlai, Jack, Snuffy, and Pick were flying the plane slow timing the engines. Suddenly a British aircraft (Mosquito) appeared from nowhere out of the night sky. It passed over the top of our bomber and missed us by five or ten feet. The steady nerves of Adlai saved us from total diaster. Another time, while our flying formation was getting formed over our Base, another group of B-17s passed through our group. There were no collisions as the pilots held firm and all ships passed through safely.

Gus also relates that we once were returning to Base from a mission when we ran into solid cloud cover over our Base. The cover was from 20,000 feet down to fifty feet. We did not have sufficient fuel to reach the alternate landing field. We thus had to descend through the cloud

cover. What if the promised fifty feet melted away? What if the altimeter were not perfectly gauged? What if another aircraft groping in this fog appeared at the same time and in the same spot as we? Thus we all watched, strained, and were relieved when we broke through right at the fifty-foot level with the runway just ahead. As Gus relates, "This was one gut-grabbing experience. As we took off on that mission in the morning I was a young man. I came back ten years older."

For every group of B-17s dispatched to a target, a certain number might not get there. Some, of course, fell victim to enemy defenses. But many had to abort due to mechanical malfunction. If a major malfunction developed over hostile territory, the instructions were to jettison the bombs and to make for friendly airspace. If a problem occured before enemy airspace was reached, the bombs were to be jettisoned in the North Sea so as not to return to Base bomb-laden. A pilot was to use his best judgement as to when an emergency interfered with his mission. The designated zone for dropping the bombs was some forty miles east of Southwals in the sea. This instruction led to the term "forty miles east of Southwald" being used as slang for "throw it away". Unlike such terms as "big wheel" and "This is it"——also World War II slang—— this reference to Southwald has not survived the War.

Great pressure was put on an aircrew to fly and to complete its missions. Once when we were on a mission, the plane we were assigned was unable to maintain altitude. When we returned to Base, a certain Lieutenant-Colonel met us upon landing and mockingly asked, "What happened?" We told him that the craft was unable to maintain altitude. He made us take him up immediately so that he could show us how it was to be done. When we began to rapidly lose altitude for no reason, the Colonel was quickly converted to our viewpoint. He began to yell, "Something's wrong with this plane!" This plane never flew combat again. It was only used for low altitude flights about England. Its technical problems

were never corrected.

Great pressure was also put on the maintenance crews to keep the maximum number of aircraft operational. We were especially indebted to our crewchief, Master-Sargeant Clarence Sargent, who was in charge of keeping our aircraft in good mechanical order. Despite his and his crew's first-rate efforts, the number of in-flight malfunctions would be great. This is when the aircrew's training and coolness would come into play. Once in the air, all mechanical difficulties became the responsibility of our flight engineer Norman Pickstone.

We were ever mindful that we were always to avoid the greatest malfunction of all: not returning from the mission. Thus any mission ending in a return to Base was to be considered a good one.

#15 Our crew chief (Clarence Sargent) and our pilot (Adlai Munday) inspecting our plane right after the name "Peoria Belle" was painted on.

IV. Brush with Death

We had been gathered from Minnesota to Texas, from Massachusetts to Oregon. Our training was complete and our deployment decided upon. Now the real thing was upon us. There we were the ten of us: cool Adlai, quiet Ox, jolly Nose, Limey Lew, efficient Pick, jovial Porky, Smiling Jack, Snuffy, Pop, and Gus. We had arrived in Britain in November of 1944 just as the Allies were attacking along the entire Western Front in an effort to close up on the Rhine. Munday flew his first mission as a co-pilot on December 15, 1944. (See Appendix 2.) The target was Hannover, Germany (Group Mission 93, flight time 6:30). This was Adlai's transitional flight in a B-17. Actually we would have flown sooner but the weather kept aircraft grounded. We did not know it but Hitler had been waiting for this same bad weather. On the morning of December 16, 1944, the Wehrmacht launched its surprise Ardennes offensive on an eighty mile front. The Germans were hoping to seize the port of Antwerp and thereby divide the British and the American ground forces. This was of course later to be called the Battle of the Bulge. Our High Command was most interested in sending air strikes against strategic German targets as soon as possible.

We, of course, knew very little about the ground situation. Wartime security meant that we were not privy to the critical nature of the ground struggle. For days after the German assault, we would be AWAKENED in the early hours, be briefed, go to our aircraft, and then have the missions cancelled because of poor weather. We could tell from the target selections that we were intended to strike at targets close to the known front. Finally on December 22, 1944, the weather improved allowing our air forces to begin their counter strikes.

On December 23, 1944 our crew flew its first mission which was against Homberg, Germany (Group Mission 94, flight time 6:05). The target was marshalling yards and a railroad junction. Our second mission was against the Irlich

Railroad Bridge at Koblenz (Neuwied) on December 28 (Group Mission 98, flight time 6:30). Gus remembers the first mission as one with a minimal of anti-aircraft fire. However, mission two was flown against very heavy flak, "those black, puffy cotton-candy shaped blots". Gus felt that the Germans were personally seeking him out. Other missions were in fact much tougher, but this one left the deepest impression on Gus. The irony of it all was that we and many other crews had been so exhausted by the continuous standby that we had almost been sent to a rest camp before we had even flown our first mission. We were relieved to get going.

Further missions followed rapidly. On December 29, we bombed the marshalling yards at Frankfurt-am-Main (Group Mission 99, flight time of 7:00). This was a frequently hit target. The city was heavily damaged during the War. On December 30, we hit Kassel, Germany, a city on the Fulda River (Group Mission 100, flight time 7:00). On December 31, the target was Misburg, a city in the Hannover-Brunswick area and an petroleum center (Group Mission 100A, flight time 7:50). Then on January 7, 1945 the target was the rail junction at the city of Paderborn, Germany (Group Mission 100C, flight time 6:15).

Weather conditions had improved but the situation was far from ideal. On Christmas Day, we had skidded off the runway because of the icy conditions. Many crews were likewise tested and challenged to keep flying. We realized that we were needed. We did our best in these trying conditions.

Such conditions inevitably led to accidents. Flying conditions were such that peacetime operations would have been cancelled. But this was wartime and risks had to be taken. Thus we come to the incident of January 10, 1945. It was common practice for crew members of one aircraft to be used as replacements for another plane. On January 10, Gus, Brad, and Snuffy were so assigned. This was Brad's seventh and final mission.

As it was taking off, the plane iced up, hit some trees after failing to reach altitude, crashed and burst into flames. The aircraft crashed some two miles from the airfield. The bombload exploded and the aircraft was of course completely destroyed. Brad and Gus were thrown from the plane while Snuffy was able to jump out. The noise and force of the blast injured Brad's hearing. Today he is some seventy years old and in good health, yet his memory of this incident has never returned. As Brad has said, "I vaguely remember shaking hands with the pilot under the plane before we got in and that's it. Everything about that day I've been told by Gus or Snuffy."

Gus has fortunately remembered the day well. Writing to Brad in a letter dated January 1, 1988, here is what Gus wrote: "You have told me that the amnesia has stayed with you regarding that day of January 10, 1945 and that you have no memory of getting out of bed, going to the briefing room, or the take-off of the plane or any other event of that day until you woke up in the hospital. This is a report on the accident of that date, a cold, snowy, gloomy, pre-dawn morning, probably about 7:00 AM. The way things were that day, our crew was not scheduled to fly. Whenever a scheduled crew was short one or more people, somebody in headquarters would come up with the necessary replacements to fill the shortages. Thus you and Bill Stepp and I drew the lucky numbers as the other crew needed a bombardier, a radio operator, and a navigator. The pilot was named Butler. I did not know the guy. I can't remember where I put my socks last night but I remember Butler's name from forty-three years ago. When the tap on the shoulder came that memorable morning, about 3:00 AM, we mumbled, grumbled, and stumbled, but we went. We did not belong to a very strong union. Only a broken leg would get us out of this duty. It was however generally considered an imposition by all to be required to fly with any crew but your own.

"We went through the customary delights of the occasion: dressing in the cold, a cold walk to the messhall, cold walk to the briefing room, formalities of briefing (maps, weather, routes, target, alternate targets, etc.), ride to the hardstand (could be a mile or two from the briefing room), check equipment, instruments, guns, etc. while the crew chief gives the airplane its last minute checks.

"We took off: each crew member in his assigned position. Although you don't remember this particular day, I can assure you that you and I were in the nose right back of the plexiglass nose cone. While assembling the bombing formations, we all had responsibilities to watch out for other aircraft so as to avoid midair collision. God knows how many crews were lost in this manner. Visibility was terrible and the sky full of airplanes circling around like a flock of geese over a feeding area for an hour or so to get into the proper position for the long ride to the target which today was the Hohenzollern Bridge over the Rhine at Cologne, Germany.

"After take-off we did not get far. We were airborne for only two or three minutes when I felt a giant vibration. Then I could see nothing but flames. Next thing I knew I was out in the snow, standing up watching this airplane burning as if I were watching a movie. Obviously, I was in shock because it took some time, I really don't know how long, for me to realize that I was a part of that scene. I realized that the plane had bombs which had not yet exploded (at least I thought so). I thought I was about to be blasted into eternity. Right close by was a big ditch later explained as an anti-invasion trench which I stumbled into. Then the bombs went off. My senses were so numbed that it sounded like nothing more than a firecracker.

"While I was in my trance and before the bombs went off, I have an image of you sprawled out like you were taking a coffee break. And

to tell the truth, I have always felt guilty about not helping you or at least trying to. Probably I could not have, what with a couple of useless hands, but it has bothered me for forty-three years.

"After the bomb blast I did not just think that you were history, I knew it. You couldn't have been over thirty or forty feet from the point of the explosion, If there was a survival miracle, you are it.

"I thought I was the only survivor out of the ten people when the jeep from the base showed up. As it developed, the pilot, the co-pilot, the engineer, and one of the gunners did not make it. Besides you and me, four guys, including Bill Stepp, got out of the rear of the plane which I found out later at the hospital. My hands were badly burned and my face not quite so badly. I was in the hospital about a month. First crack out of the box when I got back to duty I was promoted to first-lieutenant. A captain came around and shook my hand with a grip like King Kong. I wore gloves for all occasions after that for a while.

"There are other things which can be said about the remarkable fact that you and I both came out of this mess from the nose of the plane which is usually the most vulnerable location in a crash. For one thing it did not usually snow much during these dreary English winters but on this particular day there was a pretty thick carpet of snow on the ground which may have prevented broken bones and who knows what else. Another factor to consider is that on that day we did not have a full bomb load. On every mission several planes were selected to carry chaff as well as bombs; chaff being thousands of strips of aluminum which were to be dropped during the bomb run to confuse German radar. Our cargo was about five-thousand pounds of bombs and five-thousand pounds of chaff. This lighter load of bombs may have contributed to the happy circumstances that I am able to write this letter and that you are able to read it.

"I resumed flying with Munday and company until they completed their missions and went back to their happy homes in the U.S. I flew with another crew until V-Day, winding up with sixteen missions.

"I have put stuff in this letter which I have never before said to my own family.

Bill Stepp also wrote a letter (December 4, 1967) describing the evnets as he remembered them:

"January 10th, 1945 was to be another day for me of relief and relaxation because the night before our crew was not posted to fly. We sat around the barracks, talked, planned, and played cards and checkers. I suppose I hit the sack about 12:30 for a good night's rest. It was between 3:00 AM and 3:30 AM that I was awakened sharply and told to report for breakfast and then to briefing on the double. I told the corporal whose job it was to awaken the crews that were flying and who had just shaken me out of my bunk, that he must be off his rocker. My crew certainly had not been posted and that he should check his roster before waking people who were entitled to sleep once in awhile. He then told me that another pilot had three men off sick and that I, the navigator, and the bombardier of our crew were assigned to fill in for this pilot on this mission. I was terrified: the tension, the apprehension, or whatever comes over you with the thought of being taken away from the crew that you had trained so well with, that you knew everthing about and depended on and they on you, to fly with a stranger who you did not even know, an airplane that you were not familiar with, the little things or malfunctions that you know about and learn to correct on your own plane. It is like being in a really strange far-off place where nobody cares. Of course, they care but nevertheless this is the feeling you get when you get separated from your own crew, the guys that you depend on suddenly are not with you on this trip.

"I got dressed and headed for the mess hall and for breakfast which always consisted of fresh eggs, sunnyside up or any way you wanted them, hot biscuits, the whole works. Nothing was too good for you because you were probably headed for a rough day and one that you could not know the outcome of until the evening when those who had made it would return. It was least a day for breakfast as you wanted since those who were not scheduled to fly got powdered eggs from a can. I have been in the mess hall as other crew members were when the mission would be cancelled and your sunnysides were turned into powdered eggs.

"I went to the briefing room after breakfast, took a seat, and listened to the briefing officer explain what the target was. I must have drawn a blank; all I could think about was that I am not flying with my original crew. I left the briefing room not knowing how long and where the target would be. I went outside to board the truck that was always waiting to take you to the plane. The navigator and the bombardier were already in the truck. They told me who we were flying with and what the target was. I could sense that they felt as tense as I because they both remarked that they wished they were flying with Ole Dad this morning, that is what we called our pilot. We were driven to where the plane was parked. We met and introduced ourselves to the pilot and his crew. We then climbed aboard and went to our stations. Their stations were up front and my radio room was in the waist of the plane.

"It was a terrible day. It had been snowing for several days and there was at least six inches of snow on the ground. It was still snowing. The ground crew was busy servicing the plane. Two men were on the wings trying to scrape the snow and ice off. This must be done if the plane is expected to get off the ground.

"This feeling of fear and uneasiness was still with me. It got worse especially when the engines started up. I was praying that they would scrub

this mission and we could get back with our own crew. I really felt that the ground crew had not had enough time to properly clear the wings of the heavy snow and ice. The tower ordered us to line up for take-off. I was still praying for a scrubbed mission. Our crew had been ready several times, even at the head of the runway ready to go, when the control tower would inform us to taxi back to the hardstand, mission scrubbed. I knew by experience this could happen, but evidently not this morning. The pilot was taxing towards the runway and I kept waiting for him to stop and to check the engines. If all were well, then he would set the brakes, revve up the engines, release the brakes, and then you were on your way. This is the way our pilot would do and when he would start down the runway nothing short of engine failure would keep him from getting the plane into the air. Again the expected did not happen. The plane moved slowly towards the runway and never stopped. I knew then that this would be another experience for me. Evidently this pilot was used to gaining the needed power for the engines as he went down the runway to get the plane in the air. Maybe this is done and done to perfection but it was not this particular morning of January 10, 1945.

"We had a gas load of 2700 gallons. We had four one-thousand pound bombs and several hundred pounds of what we called chaff, which was like Christmas tree icicles, that we used to throw out of the plane over the target to mess up German radar. These icicles would show up on their radar. Lots of times they would be shooting at these strips until they got our range. Lots of times we could see the ack-ack exploding behind us as these metal strips were being shoved out in a shute in the rear and from the sides of our planes.

"As we were going down the runway I was sitting in my radio room which was my position, the windows were covered by frost and snow. I could not see out. It seemed as though we would never leave the ground. I knew that we were beyond the point of return. I must have been pretty close to being in shock

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from fright. It sounded as though someone was outside shoveling gravel and throwing it on the plane. The next thing I remember was a flash of light and a tremendous amount of sparks and smoke. I found myself laying across the radio room on the opposite side from where I had been sitting during the take-off. Finally I was able to get up and knew that I had to get out of there. With my hands over my face I made it to the waist of the plane. I found the ball-turret gunner and the waist gunner trying to kick the side door open. It was jammed. We did not know if we were on the ground or in the air. All we knew was that we had better get out of there and in a hurry.

"I could not find the tail gunner. I even looked for him in the tail of the plane. No tail gunner in his right mind would get into the tail during a take-off. We decided that he must of stayed up front during the take-off. We finally managed to kick open the door. We could see that we were on the ground and on fire. We started running as fast as we could. I lost one of my boots, fell several times but got up and kept running. I yelled at the top of my voice to 'Get away from those bombs!' I ran through bushes and jumped over ditches. I could not seem to get far enough away to suit myself. The snow was heavy. So was the weight of the flying suit. I finally stopped running and said a brief prayer thanking God that I had gotten out safely.

"The bombs went off. I hit the ground and kept watching for something that might hit me. I saw flames over two hundred feet high during the explosion. I then got up and yelled, 'Art! Hey, Art!' That was the name of the waistgunner. He and the ball-turret gunner were in another field and answered my call. We got together and started for a farmhouse about a half mile away.

"We met about six farmers and a couple of kids coming toward us. For a

minute we all had thoughts that we might be in enemy territory, being dazed and not knowing for sure what had really happened. When they spoke we realized that they were English. One farmer took us to his house and gave us tea and brandy.

"When we arrived, ambulances, and a lot of military personnel were there looking over the wreckage. About half the plane was left. I was busy looking for the navigator and the bombardier when a captain told me that the navigator had been badly burnt and had been sent to the hospital. He told me that the control tower had watched us stall out at about three hundred feet. We had come down, hit some trees, and lost part of the right wing before hitting the ground. He said that we were about three and a half miles from the base. I found the bombardier in an ambulance. I offered him a smoke and tried to comfort him. He kept saying, 'I can't hear you. Open the door and come on in. My head hurts.' I put my jacket under his head and stayed with him. We were brought back to the base hospital and treated. The navigator and the bombardier were given treatment at the base and then sent to the 65th General Hospital and sometime later discharged. I was kept at the base hospital for several days along with the other two gunners. The tail gunner died on the way to the hospital. The pilot, the co-pilot, and the engineer were killed instantly at the crash. The five of us who survived and those that did not get a scratch will always wonder how we did it. After a few days, it was back to the old crew to fly nineteen more missions. I was scared all the way but was able to perform my duties. But I wished all the time that the thing had never had happened. I guess that as some would say it just was not our time to go.

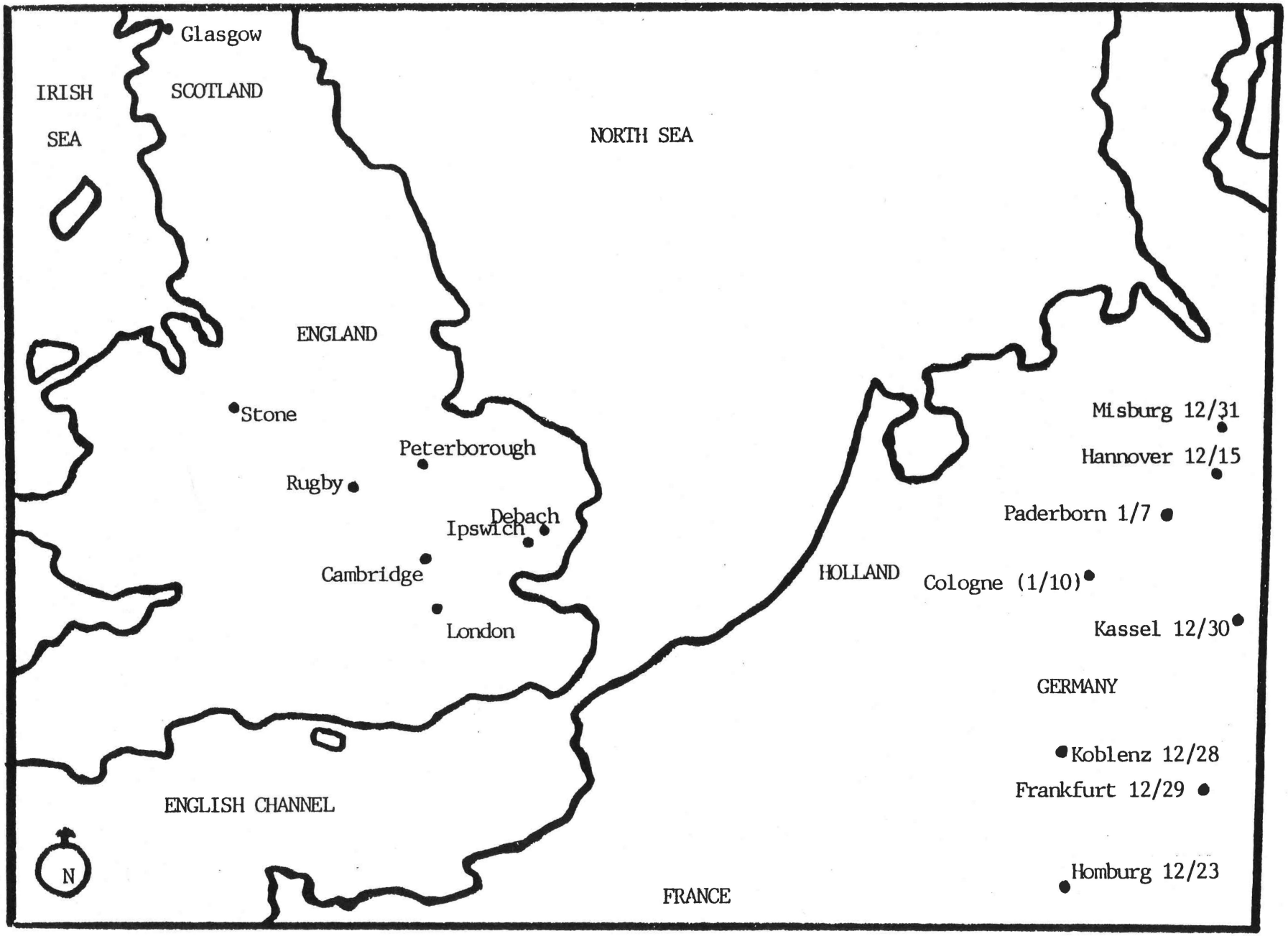
Such crashes were not unusual happenings on an airbase during wartime. Planes would not only fail to take off and crash. Others would crash upon their return from a mission. Death through mechanical failure was always a possibility. The winter of 1944-45 had been very bad throughout Western Europe. There had been frequent rains that previous fall, days of exceptionally thick

fog, and then the weeks of winter snow and alternate thawings and refreezings. The ground crews did their best but it was nearly impossible to cope with those conditions. It is a tribute to the men of the 493rd Bomb Group to report how they reacted to the crash of the Butler plane. With the runway blocked by a second plane unable to take-off, the other planes used the only runway still operational at Debach. On take-off a third plane blew a tire. Yet some thirty aircraft were launched that morning. Group Mission 100D proceeded against that Cologne bridge.

#16 Crash Sight of January 10, 1945. Several crew members were killed.

#17 Official photo of the crew of the "Peoria Belle". Front row, kneeling, left to right: Adlai Munday Jack Martin, and Robert Gaustad. Back row, standing, left to right: William Stepp, Gerald Doll, Clarence Sargent (crew chief), Eugene Coughlin, Norman Pickstone, Robert Sumnicht, Lewis Stead. (Note: Carlyle Bradbury is not pictured as he was already returned to the U.S. for medical treatment.)

EARLY MISSIONS (MAP I)



(12/15/44 - 1/10/45)

Scale: 1 cm = 25 miles

V. Crash Landings in France

After the crash of January 10, 1945, the crew had to shuffle its personnel. Brad never returned to active duty but was sent home to the United States for medical treatment. Gene served as our togalier as we were without a bombardier. Gus was temporarity replaced as navigator by Art Hildebrand. Snuffy however was able to return soon after the crash. On January 14, 1945 the newly re-organizes crew flew Group Mission 102 (flight time 7:45) against the German city of Derben, located to the west of Brandenburg.

By now we WERE accustomed to the routine of the combat mission. A typical mission began the night before we flew. Once the pilot's name was posted on the bulletin board (by 11;00 or 12:00 at the latest), we went to our hut to await our wake-up call. We tried to sleep but the thought of what and where the target would be, what would happen and the prayers for a safe mission, all combined to "kind of mess up your sleep". Snuffy says, "There would be chatter. I know alot of silent prayers were said. Just about anything you wanted to know about someone would be revealed. You ask a buddy a question at any hour of the night and get an answer. No one slept well." By the time you would doze off, the light would be turned on and the yell "Munday's Crew" would ring out. We would hear over again and again, "You gotta get up and get going!" We would usually be awakened between 3AM and 3:30 AM. We got out of bed and would head for the mess hall. Breakfast was great——fresh eggs, hot cakes, bacon, toast, all you wanted. But no one really ate that much.

After breakfast, off to the briefing room we would go and tensely wait. The entire group of crews scheduled to fly would assemble. When the briefing officers walked in, everyone stood up. Then we sat back down and got the good news. (Ha, ha, the good news!) We all had long lists of pre-flight chores to perform. But nothing was more dramatic than the briefing. The briefing room was a large room with the traditional stage and lectern. Our interest would

be focused on a large map of Europe hidden by a draw-string curtain. At the correct time, the string was drawn and the target revealed. The mission's route was charted with pins and colored yarn.

We were told when and where we were going, what the specific target was, and what enemy action to watch for. What enemy fighter defences were in the area. What kind of flak was to be expected——light, medium, or heavy. We had a hard time understanding what was meant by "light flak". Sometimes the flak was so thick that you thought you could get out of the plane and walk on it. Flak was a dreaded affair——looking like a thunder cloud suddenly appearing before you. We were also told about weather conditions, from the time of take-off, over the target, and on the return flight home.

The commanding officer was always present. The briefing officer was the one who had attempted to choose a route to the target calculated to avoid as much German defensive fire as possible. Along with the weather officer, these two officers were the only ones to know the specifics until revealed to the entire flight group. Gus says, "It was a real white-knuckle situation." There were in fact two types of targets: bad ones and very bad ones. Seeing the string finally drawn, tracing the stretched yarn, and seeing that zig-zag design all left no doubt as to what was on the docket that day. The briefing itself was actually very low key. No rah rah, let's go out and win one for the Gipper. Anything like that would have been resented and even ridiculed. We accepted the fact that we had jobs to do. Any attempt to make any special big deal about any particular mission was out of place.

Among the rough targets, Berlin was always near the top of the list. But the targets that inspired the most dread were the oil targets. Places like Misburg and Merseburg are insignificant places today. But during the War, the oil targets contained massive concentrations of anti-aircraft batteries which exacted a tragic toll on American and British bombers.

The meteorologist often gave forecasts that were less than accurate. This is no reflection on the man's ability. Northern Europe in winter is a mixing bowl of weather fronts with atmospheric conditions in a state of constant flux. Pilots, navigators, and bombardiers received more detailed briefings. They would learn the formation set up, exact time of take-off, bomb-run course, checkpoints, etc.

The chaplains seemed to be everywhere before the flight——priest, ministers, and rabbis. We were a very interfaith group. We respected everyone's religious beliefs. It is trite, but true: There were no avowed atheists to be found.

After the briefing, we went to the dressing room. We changed into our flying suits. This clothing was kept warm and dry. This was very important since once we attained altitude we would fly in the bitter cold. Frostbite was a very real threat. We would be given our parachutes and our box lunches. We also picked up our 50-caliber machine-guns. Each man would have carefully clean his weapon upon returning from a previous mission. The machine-gun had to be in perfect working condition. We then got into the truck and were driven to our plane.

The plane itself was already gassed up. The bomb load was aboard. Various types of bombs could be carried, depending on the mission: one-hundred pounders, two-hundred pounders, fire bombs, etc. Ammo for our guns would also be aboard. We would check the plane nose to tail, wing tip to wing tip. The plane would be in pre-flight status until the signal was given to start the engines. The engines had to be in perfect working order.

We taxied to our position and rolled down the runway. We would take off, pull the wheels up, and start to climb. Over the Base (Codename: Pinetop), we would form our formation and the mission would then proceed. We would now re-check our oxygen masks. We then put on our flak jackets and helmets. At 10,000 feet oxygen became a necessity. While on oxygen we had to keep in

touch with fellow crew members to be sure their oxygen was working. At altitude, any lapse in the system would soon be fatal. Sometimes we would reach altitude over England. At other times, we did so later in the missions. At a designated spot, we would pick up our fighter escorts. No one appreciated the P-47 and P-51 fighter pilots more than a bomber crew. If you were hit or struggling to make it home, you knew the escorts would help you. The Germans sought out the wounded and the crippled planes as easy prey. On the other side of the coin, when we first hit flak, crew members would be on the look out for the enemy fighters in the area.

We were always on the alert for the unusual. On one mission, an unidentified fighter turned into our group trying to regain his own escort group. A fighter moving in your direction was the most dangerous air situation possible. Was he really a friendly? Our entire group without hesitation opened fire on the fast closing craft. He quickly turned away. He soon learned to take a non-threatening route.

Our zig-zag route across the sky hopefully confused the German defenders. Chaff would be released to confuse German radar. Pick remembers the time we ran out of chaff. Snuffy then resorted to tossing out little pieces of paper with insulting messages for the Germans below.

Of course, any unsual incident brought added alertness. Once a B-17 followed our formation althought it was clearly not from our group. It maintained our group's heading and altitude. It was feared that it might be a German-manned craft sending information to the gunners below. The command was given to our fighters: If the unresponding craft failed to make the bomb run or attempted to break away from us at any time, it was to be shot down immediately. Fortunately for all concerned, the B-17 was a stray from another group. It joined our bomb run and dropped on target.

Once we started the bomb run, we did not change course for any reason.

The flak would only increase as we were locked onto the target. We had to keep going and drop our bombload. As the pilots, the togaliers, and the navigators performed their duties, the gunners would stay alert looking for planes flying overhead with bomb bays open. If a fellow bomber were to release its load on the ship beneath it, the bottom ship would be destroyed. Pick recalls when a B-17 did fly above us. He alerted our pilot who took no time to take evasive action by moving out of the way. Often the plane would be hit by shrapnel. Sometimes we could see the target being hit by our group, but we were too busy to do much sightseeing.

Coming out of the bomb run, we were alert for enemy fighters which would be ready to move in. The formation would close up and head for home. All crew members were on alert. Gerald Doll, our tail gunner, would watch the pattern of 88 fire. Once coming out of a bomb run, he informed Adlai that we were being tracked by the 88s. Adlai was able to take evasive action. The prediction was correct: We would have flown into a deadly concentration of shellbursts but for Gerald's alertness.

During the mission, we might see a B-17 hit. If the plane were going down, we would count the chutes to be able to report possible survivors. Sometimes the chutes were few in number. A couple of times we witnessed 17s exploding without any chance for survival. There was nothing we could do but fly on. After leaving enemy airspace, we would descend and take off the oxygen masks. We took off the flak jackets and the helmets. We then ate "lunch", i.e., the box of candy (hard tack/fudge), given to us before the flight. It was too dangerous to eat anything substantial at altitude. If you gassed up, it would be very painful and reduce your ability to perform your duties.

As we approached Base, those with wounded aboard would fire yellow flares and be the first to land. After landing, we rode in the truck to the

dressing room. The briefing room now became the de-briefing room. The purpose was to allow each crew member, on an individual basis, to report any unusual events and to unwind. We would be offered a shot of whiskey or coffee and donuts. Most of us found this de-briefing an unnecessary exercise. It was an unwelcome delay in the completion of the final three final high-priority items on our agenda: clean up, chow and sleep. This time the mess hall would see hardy eaters. The shower might be in cold water but it was most welcome. Then it was back to the hut and the same procedure of preparation would begin again.

With the January 10 incident behind us, a mission of January 14 completed, things were now back to normal. Well, normal until the very next mission. On January 21, 1945, we flew against Mannheim, Germany (Group Mission 105, flight time 7:40). The mission saw the "Peoria Belle" forced to head for home ——alone. Here is Lt. Munday's account of the mission:

"Mission #9 was to have been the marshalling yards at Mannheim Germany. At precisely the bomb line, props #3 and #4 began to increase RPM——prop governors had run away. The only way we could keep the engines in operation at all was to decrease manifold pressure which naturally caused us to fall behind the formation and caused us to do a 180 and head home. As we had flown east, the weather had socked in behind us. We found ourselves in no visibility. Eventually we set course south and after an hour on instruments and extreme vertigo we broke into the clear to see what appeared to be a landing strip. There had a light snow and we saw a person on the ground sweeping an arrow to indicate the direction for us to land. We did——and found the strip to be an abandoned P-47 strip from which all the metal strips had been removed. We could hardly taxi in the stuff but managed to get back to the head of the strip and found a farmer whose name was Boucher. We were near LeMans, France. We had set it down with our bombs on board and short of fuel.

"The first person to come to the strip was a French official who said that he could put us in contact with a bomb disposal squad and maybe secure some 100 octane for us. Jack Martin rode off with him and we were welcomed by the farmer Boucher to stay there while we were getting rid of the bombs and putting 150 gallons of 100 octane and waiting for a freeze so we could leave. We were treated ~~like~~ as if we were kings——steaks and eggs for breakfast, lamb chops, etc.

"During our stay there, Norman Pickstone, our engineer, determined that the prop governors would need replacing before full power could be extracted from #3 and #4. Therefore——on the morning of the first freeze ——we took off with full power in #1 and #2 and with half power on #3 and #4. We flew to Paris, where in two or three days, the work was completed on #3 and #4 governors. We were thus able to return to Debach. Upon calling Pinetop, we discovered that we were no longer on the roster, having been reported as 'missing'. Our communications from France had not been received in Debach. All our possessions had been removed from our huts. They were to be shipped to the U.S.A. the very next day. We made it back just in time to recover them and to get back to active status."

When we first landed in France we were unsure of our location. Adlai noticed that the locals were wearing wooden shoes. He thought we might be in occupied Holland. "Are we about to be made guests of the Krauts?" Jack in the meantime asked Snuffy to see if he could find out where we were. Snuffy had always claimed that he could get anything on the radio. Jack now said: "See if you can get Little Orphan Annie!" This brought laughter from the crew including Snuffy. The situation was tense. Lew vividly recalls Ox saying that the engines should not be turned off. Ox loaded his 50-calibers saying, "They won't take us without a fight!" Standing orders when downed behind the lines were to destroy the bombsight

and then "evade capture as long as possible"——a rather grim possibility. Ox meant to fight it out on the spot. Fortunately for the enemy, we had landed in friendly territory as Doll always meant what he said.

We had in fact landed near Bonnetable-Courcival, in the department of Sarthe, some twenty miles southeast of LeMans. Monsieur Boucher was the one who had swept that arrow in the snow. We were very lucky to have Lew on our crew. He spoke French very well and we were able to communicate quite well with the locals. In fact the only one who had trouble understanding our plight was an MP major who would offer us only fifty gallons of gas thinking this was enough to get us to Paris.

After landing we performed our duties about the craft. Then we went rabbit hunting. We got fifteen rabbits. Mrs. Boucher cooked them and we ate them. The Bouchers had several children making it a crowd of some twenty to feed. They generously and unselfishly fed us. The water was undrinkable but the Bouchers supplied all the wine we could drink. They did this without being asked and without being compensated. We did share our meager rations. Mrs. Boucher was an excellent cook. We did take Monsieur Boucher to town. We got his hair cut and some smelly water was put on him by the barber. His family got a big charge out of this.

While hunting, Jack shot a fox. We intended to take the hide home. While getting the plane repaired in Paris, the fox hide was stolen. If Jack had caught the thief, he would have taken the thief's hide home.

After spending several wonderful days with the Bouchers, we flew to Paris for the temporary repairs, gas, and proper weather that would allow us to fly back to England. We flew over the Eiffel Tower before we landed. Because of weather problems, first in France and then in England, we did not return to base for thirteen days after our downing. We arrived in Paris on January 26. (See Appendices 3 & 4.) We were sent to the

Seine headquarters.

Bob Sumnicht and Norman Pickstone were assigned space in a large open room filled with cots. Some had springs. They got plain wood. The room was very cold. We all had only our flying suits and dog tags and unable to stay in such conditions and freeze. Army personnel on leave in Paris were billeted there. They had blankets and were well satisfied with the room; Bob and Norm were not. They reported to Adlai, who loaned them some money, so they could check into a local hotel. Norm writes: "We left and found a room in a small hotel. The desk clerk asked us for our passes. We told him we did not have any, but he gave us a room anyway.. About the time we fell asleep, a knock on the door woke us up. 'Who's there?' 'MPs! Let us in!' We did. 'Where are your passes and leave papers?' 'We don't have any.' When they heard this, their eyes gleamed like skunks eating pokeberries. After we told them why we were in Paris, they clamed down a little. But they insisted that we go with them. We insisted that they get our money back first. But the clerk refused a refund. 'In that case, we are not leaving. We're going back to sleep.' They took our names and told us to report to the Provost Marshall's office the first thing in the morning. They gave us the address. We said okay. 'Believe me. We never saw those jokers again. And we did not report to the Provost Marshall either.'"

The next day the crew re-assembled. We got our passes and got rooms in the Hotel Francais, 100 Rue de Lafayette. Our troubles with the authorities saw one more unpleasant incident. We were still only in our flying suits with elctric cords dangling about. We ran into an Army major who dressed us down in no uncertain terms. Bill Stepp told him to read our passes. When he realized we were downed airmen, the major immediately changed his attitude. He took us to the PX for personal supplies and clothing. We later received a partial pay.

But Paris was not the Boucher farm. It was an alien urban center. It was

for us most unlike anywhere we had ever been before. We all met the Frenchmen who could not speak English until offered cigarettes. Some French would object to the use of "yeah" for "yes" saying the former was too much like the "ja" of the Boche. Norm for one wondered how they all claimed to be Free French; he kept wondering where the collaborators had gone. Still it was a wonderful adventure to be in the French capital. Spoofing the French with a "Barn door, cow manure!" instead of "Bonjour, monsieur!" was rather silly. But the excitement of the place made London seem placid. We went to the famed Follies, the Parisian burlesque show. Some went to the Casino de Paris. Pigalle (termed Pig Alley by the GIs) was a section of town without compare. It was carnival-like, a place where anything goes. "Stand on a corner in Pig Alley and the entire world will go by in five minutes." While in Paris we had a ball. We saw the Arch of Triumph, Notre Dame, etc. Parisian food was unbelievably good. French cooks at the military installations even turned Army rations into great food. We fondly remember a certain French bar at 100 Rue du Helder.

One night Jack, Lew, and Pick decided to ride the Metro (subway). They rode for a while when Lew began to jump up and yell, "Fini la guerre!" The French riding the subway would begin to jump with joy. Then Lew would say, "Peut-etre!" The disappointed French would then be seated. Lew did this several times after which the others asked him what he was saying. He said that he said that "The war is over!" and then said "Perhaps!" Lew thought this was great fun. Jack now suggested that they all get off and have a smoke. This they did but when they returned to board the Metro they learned that it was closed for the night. They wandered around until they bummed a ride with a passing Army convoy going into Paris. It was a two MILE ride back to the hotel. No more long rides on the Metro.

Finally we were able to leave and return "home" to Debach. Flying over the sea we crossed over the White Cliffs of Dover. They are truly

white and a spectacular sight to see for the first time.

We soon returned to the routine of combat. On February 9, we attacked the marshalling yards at Munster, Germany (Group Mission 111, flight time 7:00). On February 14, we assaulted the marshalling yards at Chemnitz, Germany (Group Mission 112, flight time 8:10). Jack would often laugh and announce such transportation targets with "Today we attack old ladies and baby carriages!" Grim humor indeed. It was during such distant eastern missions as Chemnitz that we witnessed German jet fighters attack a bomber group ahead of us. Fortunately these jets were high consumers of fuel and were inthe air for relatively short periods of time. We felt that our group flew such a tight formation that the jets sought out those groups more loosely organized. Just the same Norm says, "It was a funny feeling watching these jets which seemed as fast as lightning to us."

February 15 was Group Mission (flight time 8:40). Its objective was Cottbus, Germany far to the east. Cottbus was a secondary target for which we had not been properly fueled. Here is Munday's account of the mission: "Mission #12, February 15, 1945 turned out to be one of the longest missions we were to fly. The target was Cottbus, Germany, an hour or so beyond Berlin. Our routing was to the south of Berlin. Then north to Cottbus and return the same. We were assigned a new aircraft because the 'Peoria Belle' had been damaged the day before and needed repairs before we could fly it again. One of our responsibilities today was to calibrate fuel usage and make records of all RPM settings as well as manifold pressure, etc. as we went. Just about the time we were back of the 'bomb line' and over friendly territory, Art Hildebrand, navigator informed us we would be too low on fuel to attempt the Channel crossing and would need to find a place for refueling. He also said that to try for the usual refueling strip would be marginal, since it was located

on the coast of France. We were to learn that he was correct. We relayed this to our CO in the lead plane and asked for the OK to go to Brussels for fuel. We were told in no uncertain terms that we should go to our usual refueling strip——not Brussels. Four other crews were in the same shape we were and were issued the same orders. As the CO put it, he figured we all wanted to go to Brussles to see that city and maybe we would make it back to Debach about next Tuesday.

"When we arrived at the coast of France, we encountered serious visibility problems. We flew across the beacon twice on the required heading and altitude and descended to within fifty feet and all we were able to see were housetops and church steeples. There was zero visibility. We had been informed that there was a 500 foot ceiling and one mile visibility. Art Hildebrand at that point said we should not try that again because we were running out of gas. I told the tower we were climbing on a heading toward Paris and as soon as we had enough altitude we would bail out.

"We were preparing to do this when we spotted an opening in the clouds, exposing what appeared to be a perfect cement runway——and we would be glad to put it to some use. We were on the downwind leg when #2 quit. It was apparent that we were NOT going to be able to complete the pattern. We immediately turned 90 degrees left and approached the strip at 90 degrees instead of head on. As we flared out to land (wheels up), three power lines loomed up in our path. With the last of the fuel, we were able to get over the lines and then flared out to land. Jack hit the power switch off and we landed crossways of the runway. The runway was used by the German Air Force. When they had abandoned it they built pillars of reinforced cement three-feet square and six-feet tall ——three rows about thirty feet apart. We could never have made a successful landing on that runway. As we came in cross-ways, we ran through seven of these pillars, causing damage to the aircraft and actually tearing out #3 engine. We came to a stop next to a bomb crater that was full of water. After

we got out and surveyed the situation and thanked our lucky stars that we were all OK, Jack and Art broke out the rubber raft and we all took rides on the water.

"All five crews seeking a fuel stop that day landed wheels up."

It had been a fearful landing. Norm recalls that as they were landing water began to leak into the plane. His first thoughts were that it was gasoline and that an explosion would follow shortly. A local farmer witnessed the crash. He told the crew that he had waited to see chutes appear and that when the plane crashed with all still aboard that he had come to the sight to help with the bodies because he knew that all had been killed. Pick says, "What he didn't know was that this was the crew of the 'Peoria Belle'. It's not bragging to tell the truth. We had the two best pilots who ever flew an aircraft." Munday himself is more charitable saying, "Maybe pilots had skill but there were an awful lot of skilled pilots." Lew took several pictures of the crash sight which underline the serious nature of the landing and the skill of Jack and Adlai in saving everyone from injury or death.

And so we began another visit to the Continent. At the Luftwaffe airfield we made an odd discovery. The outhouses built by the Germans had exceptional foundations but the openings in the toilet seats were incredibly large. One had to hold on for fear of falling in. The conclusion was obvious: The Germans must be the biggest bottomed people in the world! After we squared up the plane, we were taken across the border into Belgium by the local military authorities. We passed through Charleroi. We stayed as the house of a dentist in Mons. The dentist's wife was the most beautiful woman we had ever seen in our lives; her husband was the ugliest man we had ever seen. We were too polite to ask but we assumed that she had married him for his money!

We also learned something about our British allies' ideas of class. Late one evening we were taken to a British outfit, a transportation unit of some

kind. We had not eaten for some time and told them so. We were an Air Force crew of officers and NCOs. The fellow in charge of the mess hall told us that the officer and NCO messes were closed but that he would open them for us. We noticed some Brits eating in a neighboring room and suggested that we join them. To our surprise, we were told by a horrified Briton that we were viewing an enlisted men's mess and that it was beneath our rank to eat with the likes of them. He was even more horrified when we said that we did not worry about rank. We did not think that we were better than anyone else. We were only interested in food. He told us that we would have to accept the responsibility of eating in the regular mess. When we went in and sat down, at first the British privates were totally silent and shocked when we began to speak to them. After a short while, we were able to get them to speak to us. They turned out to be a great bunch of guys. We enjoyed the meal and their company very much indeed!

We were flown back to England aboard a C-47. We felt funny flying as passengers in someone else's plane. The only thing we brought back to England from the plane we had flown out was a clock that Munday gave to Lt. Stindt. As Munday explains the needless loss of a good plane left us uneasy after learning of Stindt's crew's fate: "On Mission #12 when we landed wheels up in France, we destroyed a new aircraft that was to be assigned permanently to the crew of Lt. Fred Stindt. Five days later when Fred took off on a mission to Nurnberg, fire broke out in #3 engine and he was forced to ditch in the river Deben (in England). He was the only one who was able to get out of the plane. He told me that day that the plane sank like a rock. He said that when he went out the pilot's window there were three right behind him. He had been confident that other would be getting out. It was not to be."

Mission #13 was on February 23, 1945 against the Kitzingen railroad bridge across the Main River in Bavaria, Germany. This was Group Mission 118

(flight time 8:10). To Stepp and to many others of our crew, this was the most memorable mission of all. An 88-mmm shell penetrated the right wing. The crew decided to a man to ride it out with Munday. Bill says, "No one would leave him." Here is Adlai's account: "For Mission #13, 15 February, 1945, we were assigned to aircraft #276. This airplane had a reputation of 'no take-off'. There had been four attempts lately to get it off the ground but to no avail. Engines would run OK, manifold pressure was OK, but it did not seem to have the guts to get up to air speed enought to take-off---so it would have to be shut down at the last second in order to avert disaster.

"For this mission our fuel load was only 1400 gallons and we had a relatively light bomb-load---so we thought we might have a chance to make it fly. When we reached the point of decision on the runway we were showing 98 MPH, about 12 too low for comfortable take-off. I called for full flaps and Jack ran them down. We staggered off the ground with the wheels coming up fast. We got over the trees with about three feet to spare and as soon as we could dump the nose and retract the flaps we were flying. We noted all day that we needed more turbo and RPM to stay with the formation. There was something wrong somewhere, but up to now nobody had been able to figure it out! Our primary target was weathered in and we were unable to drop our bombs there. As we returning to base, the lead plane commander spotted an alternate target. It was a bridge across the Main River at Kitzingen. We had been descending for some time and were about 13,000 feet when we dropped on the bridge. The bomb bay doors had just closed when we were hit by an 88mm that went through our fuel tank between #3 and #4. We all felt it and it did not take long to realize that we were in big trouble. The missle was designed to explode on impact but waited ~~to explode~~ about twenty feet above the wing to do that. We have always wondered why we were so lucky. Right away fuel began trailing through the ruptured tank. We feathered #4 and began a conversation about

bail out. According to the navigator, we would still be over enemy territory for about twelve minutes. This was a major reason, since we were still flying that we decided to sweat it out. Fuel was discovered coming into the bomb bay, so there was nothing to do but feather #3. As we were now flying on two engines, we could not maintain altitude. As a result all parts that could be disconnected were pitched out——guns, survival kits, etc. This helped some and Jack and I——standing on the rudder——settled down to see just how long we could stay in the air. Eventually the fuel could no longer be seen trailing out of the wing and the two engines were doing their job well. So we became optimistic that we could make it into friendly territory. As we were still descending and coming close to decision time for bail-out, we came over a hill to see——about five miles ahead——a P-47 strip in operation. The 47s were taking off from each end of the strip one at a time. We got on the emergency channel and began talking——'We are a low-flying B-17 approaching from the East with about five minutes of flying time left. If we can use your strip, we will appreciate it...' That was about all I had said when a big green light flashed out of the tower. Right away the 47s began taking off in pairs and the strip was cleared in about three minutes.

"We made one circle of the field and landed. As we flared out to a three point attitude, gas started coming out of the right wing again. All the crew who were in the rear near the door waiting for their chance to get out of there, did so, tumbling out onto the strip. We coasted to the end of the runway being careful not to use brakes——lest the Servo motor in the bomb bay cause an explosion——punched out 1 and 2 and turned out of the runway onto the hardstand and came to a stop. Jack and I got out fast. We were put on a train that night and went to Paris where we were put in a hotel for two nights before we flew back to Debach on a DC 3 to go back to work.

"By now my nickname was Pierre because of all the time we had spent on

the Continent."

Pick as the flight engineer was seated in the top turret. He recalls the shell's impact. "I saw the 88 shell go through the wing. It jolted the ship. A puff of smoke appeared ten to fifteen feet above the wing as the shell exploded. Knowing that 88-shells threw shrapnel, I thought that we had had it. It's a feeling I can't describe." This was the closest that we came to selling the farm. Norm continues, "It must have been pre-set for a certain altitude or time. Thank God, it did not go off on impact. Althought the crew was concerned, no one showed any fear. But I believe that it was on all our minds..."

Lt. Munday was, and still is, a gentleman. He never used profanity for any reason. When the 88 hit, Jack reported, "Munday, we have a hell of a hole in the right wing." Munday looked over and said, "Oh, shit!" The crew knew that we must be in very serious trouble. It was a very ticklish situation. With engines being feathered and gasoline pouring into the ship, Lt. Munday told us to bail out. Flight engineer Pickstone then asked, "Sir, are you going to jump?" Adlai replied, "No, I am going to land it." Norman then said, "I am landing with you." The entire crew agreed. We preferred to stay with Adlai and take our changes. No one would leave him.

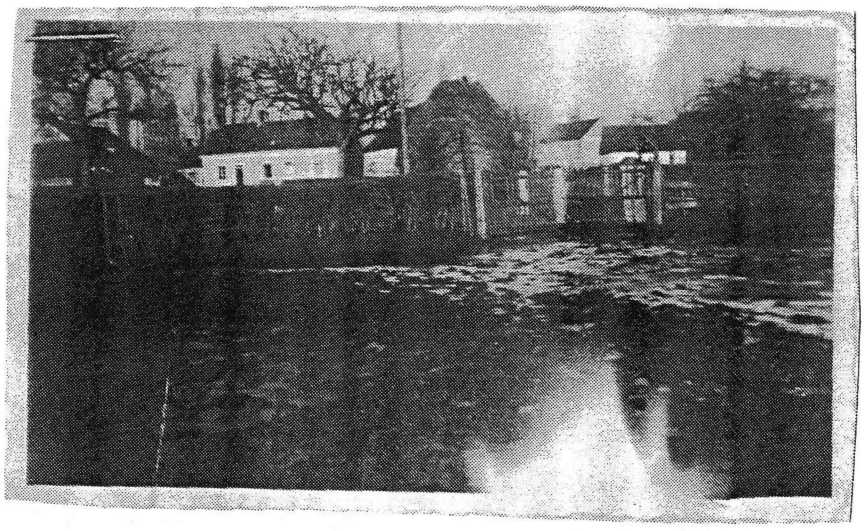
Both Adlai and Jack had to take control to maintain any altitude. The two right engines had to be feathered. Adlai and Jack flew as one, each knowing the other's moves. Such co-ordination ultimately saved us.

After we had safely landed, the P-47 airfield authorities told us that we were too close to the front. We were taken by truck to a train depot and sent to Paris. We did not argue. We rode a night train into the city. On board, we met a G.I. who was going to Paris to deal on the

black market. He was carrying a sack of champagne. He intended to make a killing. He had already gone through a couple of bottles himself. When we left him, the sack was empty and empty bottles littered the tracks. There was not much that he could do about it.

When we hit Paris this second time, we knew the score. We went to the Hotel Francais. We got a partial pay and rations again. We did Paris in style. But soon we were flown back to base to continue our combat tour.

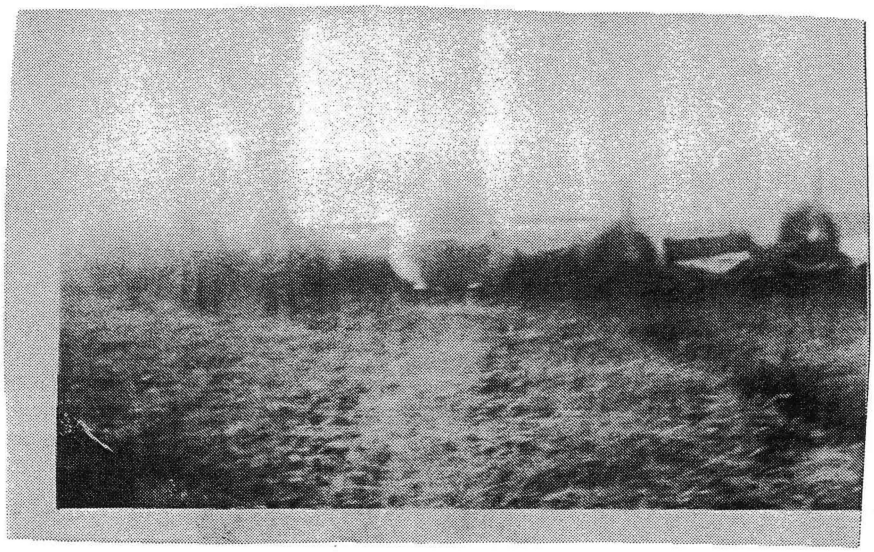
#18 Mademoiselle Marie-Therese Boucher (Courcival, Sarthe, France).



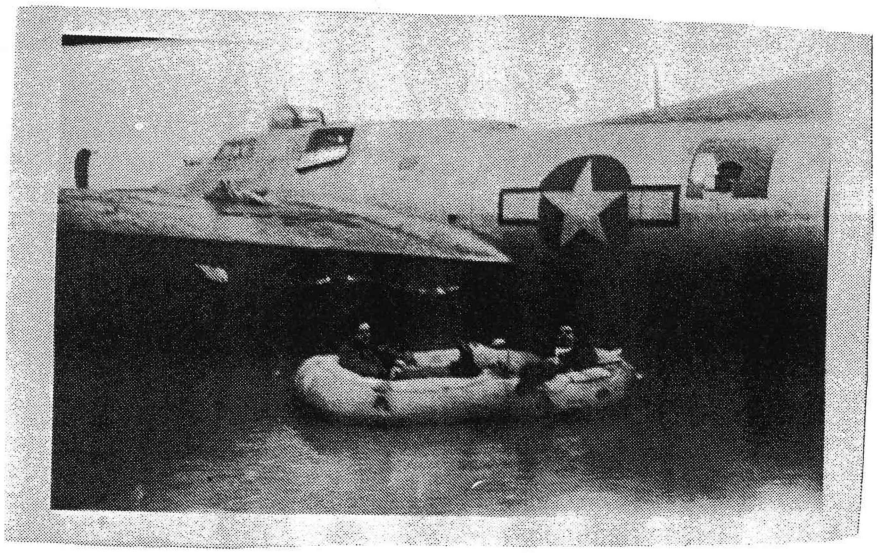
#19 The Boucher farmhouse where we stayed after landing nearby.

#20 Our crashed plane in Northern France, Feb. 15, 1945.

#21 Crash sight of Feb. 15, 1945. Standing by the engine is an unidentified member of the crew. Standing before the nose, left to right: Lt. Munday, Gene, Norman (holding Two-Rad) and Jack.



#22 Crash sight of February 15, 1945.

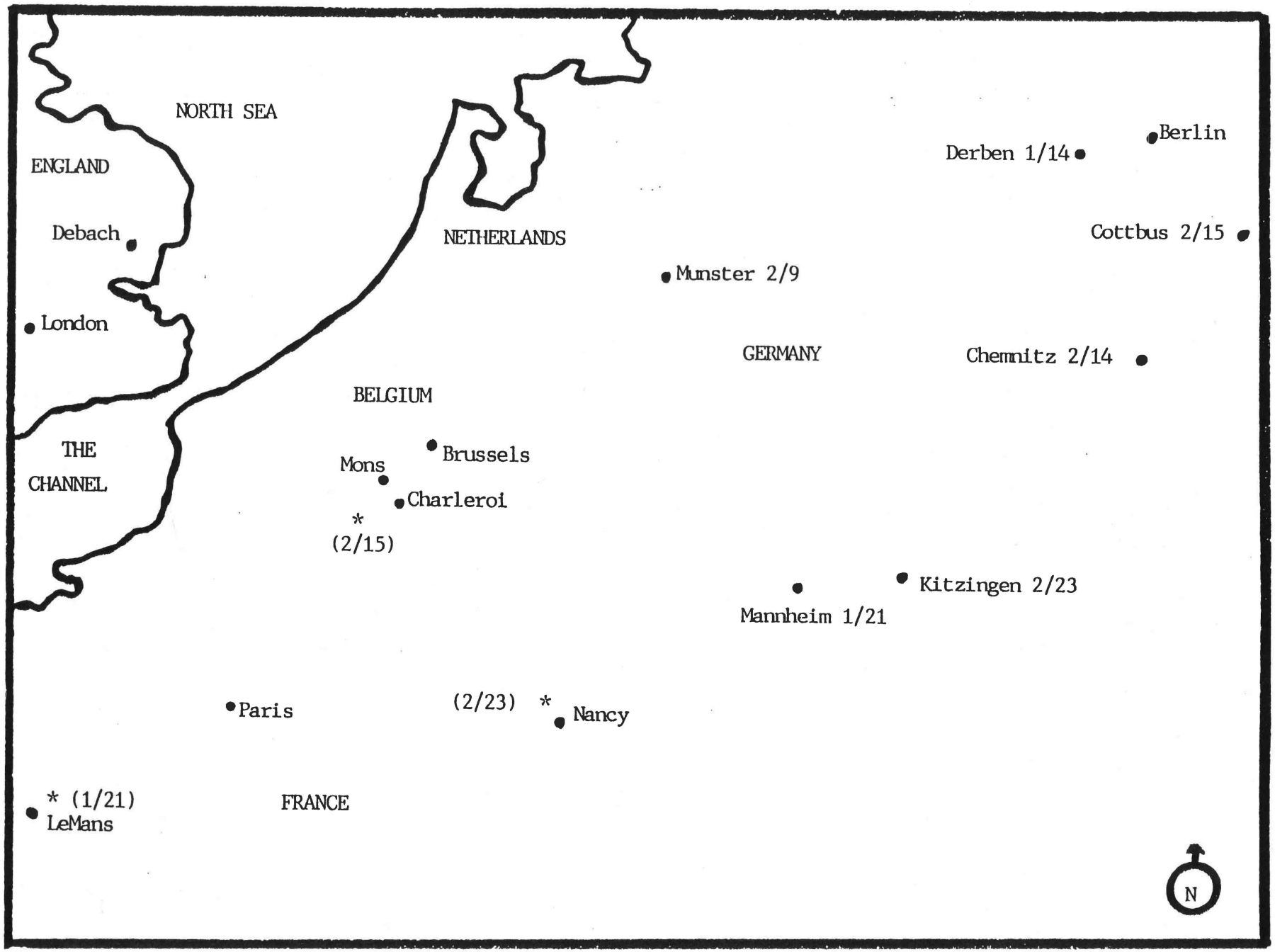


#23 Life raft floated in a bomb crater, Feb. 15, 1945.
Left to right: Art and Jack.

#24 Engine ripped from plane at crash of Feb. 15, 1945.

#25 Torn out engine in the foreground of crash of Feb. 15, 1945.

CRASH LANDINGS IN FRANCE (MAP II)



(1/14/45 - 2/23/45)

* = Forced Landings

Scale: 1 cm = 25 miles

VI. Victory

We resumed flights on Feb. 23, 1945 with a mission against Kassel, Germany (Group Mission 122, flight time 6:50). The target was marshalling yards. On March 4, 1945 the entire group was recalled because of bad weather (Group Mission 125, flight time 6:20). The intended target had been Datteln, Germany. Four days later on March 8, 1945, the target was the industrial city of Dortmund, Germany (Group Mission 127, flight time 7:50). We hit the U-boat yards at Hamburg, Germany on March 11 (Group Mission 129, flight time 6:40). March 12 saw the target as Siegen, Germany (Group Mission 130, flight time 6:35). We hit Misburg for a second time on March 14, 1945 (Group Mission 131, flight time 6:45).

We then went calling on the Fuehrer. Our twentieth mission was against "the Big B", Berlin. This was on March 18, 1945 (Group Mission 134, flight time 7:30). The optical works at Jena, Germany were struck on March 19, 1945 (Group Mission 135, flight time 8:45). The airfield at Zwischenahn, Germany was bombed on March 21, 1945 (Group Mission 136, flight time 5:50). We flew against Siegen for a second time on March 23 (Group Mission 138, flight time 6:30). Varel's airfield was our target on March 24 (Group Mission 139, flight time 6:00). Hannover was our target on March 28 (Group Mission 140, flight time 7:15). We struck Brandenburg, Germany (Group Mission 143, flight time 8:25) on March 31.

Our last targets were outside pre-war Geramny. The Germans were, for example, still occupying strategic spots in France. On April 16, 1945 we bombed the German-occupied naval port of Rochefort, France (Group Mission 153, flight time 6:35). It was by now quite evident to all that the Nazis were in their death throes. The last intact German Army-Group on the Continent was in Bohemia. Patton had been ordered to halt at Pilsen. The Soviets were closing in on Prague. Our last three missions were in effect in support of

the Soviets. On April 17, 1945 we struck the oil dump and marshalling yards at Roudnice nad Labem (Group Mission 154, flight time 8:45). Our target on April 18 was at Kolin (Group Mission 155, flight time 9:40). Kolin is east of Prague and was our most eastern target of the War. Our last mission was against Aussig (Usti nad Labem) (Group Mission 156, flight time 8:45). Marshalling yards were our target again.

It is ironic but on this day, the day of our last mission, Lew's brother was liberated from a P-O-W camp. About two weeks after the event, Lew received the news from his mother back in the States. Until then none of the crew had known about Lew's brother's plight. The Steads had not wanted to worry the crew with their worries. Lew's mother had however remained in contact with Munday's wife during the War. Supporting one another was important; worrying one another was not. The crew was also aware that the Mundays were expecting their first child who was to be christened Mike. Well, Mike turned out to be RITA Mary instead.

During the first part of April, we had been granted some R & R at a Flak Shack. It was an opportunity to relax and unwind after three or more months of combat. It was something all crews looked forward to. The Flak Shack was a government-paid hotel for air crews. While at the Flak Shack, the place was buzzed by former guests——P-51 pilots who flew their planes 100 feet above the area. After our crew left, Jack flew our B-17 over the Flak Shack and buzzed the area at an altitude of under 50 feet! Jack received several letters from fighter pilots saying that it was the best buzzing they had ever seen.

While the crew was in the rest home, Lt. Munday got Norman Pickstone a pass so that he could go on furlough to Scotland with his brother Bill. The two brothers took a train in Edinburgh and then the bus to Peebles, Scotland. Bill had come to love the British. He loved to

answer the ladies with an "OK, Duck!" Norm was more taken aback by the British questioning the kind of "kite" he flew. He was even more upset by the Scottish practice of locking the hotels at 10 PM and not even allowing paying guests to re-enter until opening time. All in all, the two had a wonderful time. On their return to England, they stopped at a railroad station. The date was April 12, 1945. They noticed that the locals seemed quite upset. A group of English, both men and women, were crying. They asked what had happened. They were told that the "President is dead." To which they replied, "President Who?" "Why, President Roosevelt!" It was obvious that the British held FDR in great affection.

Although our formal combat missions were over, we remained busy. Lt. Munday reports that "Our crew flew two Dutch food missions to Amsterdam--- dropping from two-hundred feet supplies for the people there. We also flew one group of officers on a trip to Paris, Frankfurt, Koeln, at about 500 feet to examine some of the bomb damage inflicted on that country."

By early 1945 the Dutch were facing starvation on a massive scale. It was agreed that the German gunners would not fire on us as we dropped cheese, flour, and the like to the civilian populace. We had our doubts about German intentions. Norm recalls that "during the briefing before a Dutch mission, the briefing officers said that 'If fired upon, hit the deck.' One of the younger pilots asked him what he meant. The officer replied, 'When you have to look up to see the trees, you are on the deck!' We all laughed." Our bomb bays were adapted to carry food. A plywood platform was built to hold rations. It was all roped down. At 300 to 500 feet, and at ~~150~~ 120 MPH, the food was dropped. The Dutch below waved flags thanking us for the food. Once while on a food run, Jack decided to hit the deck to see what it was like. We were so low that we watched people jumping into the canals to avoid being hit. Being below sea level, we had to fly up to reach the North Sea. We especially remember the

vast fields of tulips——a very beautiful sight.

V-E Day led to huge celebrations at our Base. A huge bondfire was built. We all gathered around. Speeches were made. (Japan would be next!) Throughout the night, singing and cheering filled the air. After the War's conclusion is when we flew the tours for the ground officers. On one mission we flew a load of champagne back to England. Prudence forbids revealing the few crew members who sampled the cargo before the flight and who nearly walked off the wings in the joy of being victorious and alive.

We received our medals: ETO Medal with four battle stars (Northern France, the Ardennes, the Rhineland, and Central Europe), the Air Medal with several oak leaf clusters, the American Theater Medal, the Victory Medal, and the Good Conduct Medal. As for the last one, others did not receive the Good Conduct Medal and had done less than we had, but they had gotten caught!

How does one end a tale such as this? Such a variety of memories come rushing back. Many crew members remember the experience of counting the two-hundred holes shot through the plane due to enemy gunfire. But to Bob Sumnicht the most personal memory was the time we had been ordered to bail out over enemy territory. He almost bailed out thinking that all were going. He was stopped by Lew who told him Adlai was staying. Bob of course was staying too. Stepp's most memorable mission was when that other formation of bombers flew through our formation. "I thought it was all over. I don't know how we escaped midair collision." Stepp is reminded of Norman's courage. "I will never forget watching you kick bombs out that wouldn't release, while you were standing on that tiny catwalk, with a walk-around bottle. Talk about praying. My biggest fear was that you might motion me out for help." Brad recalls the time we were in heavy flak. No one realized that Gus's oxygen line had been cut by flak. He began to sing as he became dizzy. We were able to save him from suffocating.

To Lt. Munday, the most memorable of incidents vary. Breaking in the engines and nearly being hit by the British Mosquito is near the top of his list. The dedication of the crew is also a most important memory. Adlai will always remember the attack on that bridge at 13,000 feet to be a very poor decision by our air commander. A little to the right or the left and it would have all been over for the crew of the "Peoria Belle".

Gus recalls landing in prop wash and needing to circle the field again. The dangers of circling in formation and trying to avoid midair collision remains with Gus to this day. To Norman, the most vivid of memories is the hung-up bombs during a bomb run. When the bomb bay opened, it was the togalier's job to say, "Bomb bay clear." The flight engineer was to check if all bombs were released and report, "Bombs away." When that did not happen, then "My job became serious." While walking on the catwalk some four or five miles in the air, "all kind of things pass through your mind. Prayers run together." Luckily he got them to drop. Then there is the ironic and unexplainable. On another run, the bomb bay failed to close. Norm had to leave the top turret and hand crank it shut. This malfunction probably saved his life. On his return to his position, Norm discovered a large shrapnel hole through the turret bubble. Had he been present at the time of impact he would have probably been killed instantly. In contrast to this, Norm also recalls the beauty of the Danube while flying high overhead.

Others recall watching "Nose" going for chaf without his oxygen bottle and then not throwing it from the chute but into the waist of the plane. And then there were all the people we had met , both military and non-military personnel, both in Britain and on the Continent. There is of course Art Hildebrand who left our crew when Gus returned. We lost contact

with him. Some claim that he was reported shot down during a Hamburg raid. But his fate we never learned. Then there is the P-51 pilot who helped us when we had turbo failure and could only attain 6,000 feet while still deep inside Germany. In answer to our call for help, a P-51 appeared on our wing and stayed with us until we were in friendly airspace. Lew took a photo of the fighter. It was a Mustang of the 339th Fighter Group. Decades later Lew was able to discover the pilot's name: Phil Petitt. Well, Phil, we can never thank you enough.

And the Boucher family. You, we will never forget. There is that elderly British grandmother who invited Jack and Norm to dinner at her home in celebration of V-E Day. When they arrived in formal military attire, she was taken aback. "I thought you were American Tommies!" Apparently she had no love for officers and NCOs.

Other stories have a more tragic twist. One morning while changing into his flying suit in preparation for a mission, Norm struck up a conversation with Sgt. Sanders, a fellow flight engineer. Gossip was that all flight engineers were about to be commissioned and thus also be given extended tours of duty. Norm said that he was not that interested in a commission. Sanders however said that he would accept one if offered. They finished suiting up and off they went. "My friend never returned. His plane went down. I never knew what had happened to him. I only knew that my friend was gone."

Other memories are less sanguine. Dunkirk is linked with the British evacuation of 1940. Dunkirk is also part of the history of the "Peoria Belle". The city remained part of the German coastal defences in France by-passed by the Allies. Whenever overflying such a position, one maintained a high altitude. In early 1945, we had lost power and were heading home as best we could. It was hazy. Gus now takes over: "This was my big

moment. I was on stage. By the time I had positively figured out where we were, we were on the verge of flying directly over Dunkirk. At 5,000 feet we would have been duck soup. Anyway, we made fast corrections and got back safely. I think all the guys started speaking to me again after a couple of days." While we were approaching Dunkirk, Munday had called for his helmet. He had forgotten that he had previously urinated into it. Jack handed the helmet to Munday with an impish grin. Jack rolled in laughter as Munday received this "baptism of fire". The crew was roaring with laughter and so was Munday!

We also had a routine inside joke. At some time during the mission, a crew member would ask the navigator how far it was from Sweden or Switzerland, depending on the target. The navigator would reply that he had already plotted the course, just in case.

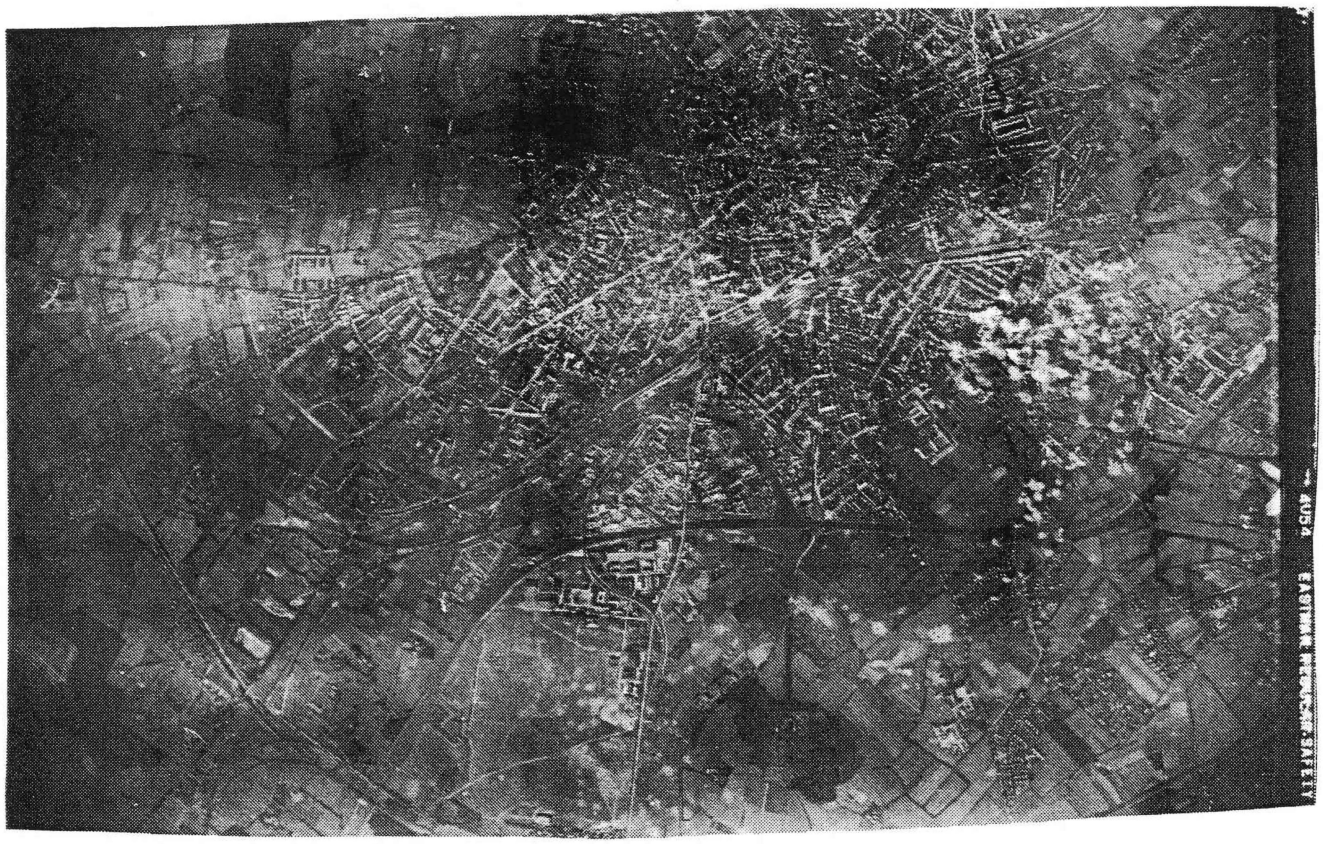
Overall, it was not very humorous very often. During the crew's tour, we were forced to leave formation nine times because of mechanical and/or weather problems. Once the problem was flak damage to the oxygen system. Another time was that loss of all four turbo superchargers at 18,000 feet. A third time a leaking engine fuel primer was the problem. Jack and Pick worked on it until gasoline began running off the flight deck. On four of these nine aborts, the crew who moved into our position failed to return to base. Munday says, "We truly felt we were leading charmed lives."

Some incidents were unexplainable. Once we were given a milk run of only a few minutes over hostile territory. Trying again and again, our plane stalled out and we were scratched. A replacement plane took our place with eagerness. The replacement plane was shot down with no survivors!

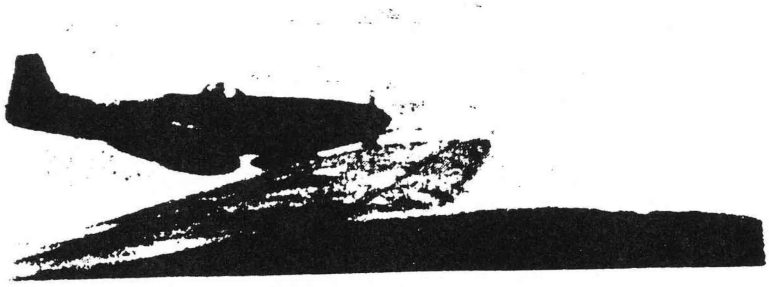
Once at a post-War reunion of the crew, Norman remarked how lucky we had been back then. "Now I can not pick even a single winning lottery number." To this several crew members replied, "We all used up our luck in the War."

#26 Left to right: Jack and Adlai, returning from a mission.

#27 Overhead photo of our raid on Varel airfield, March 24, 1945.

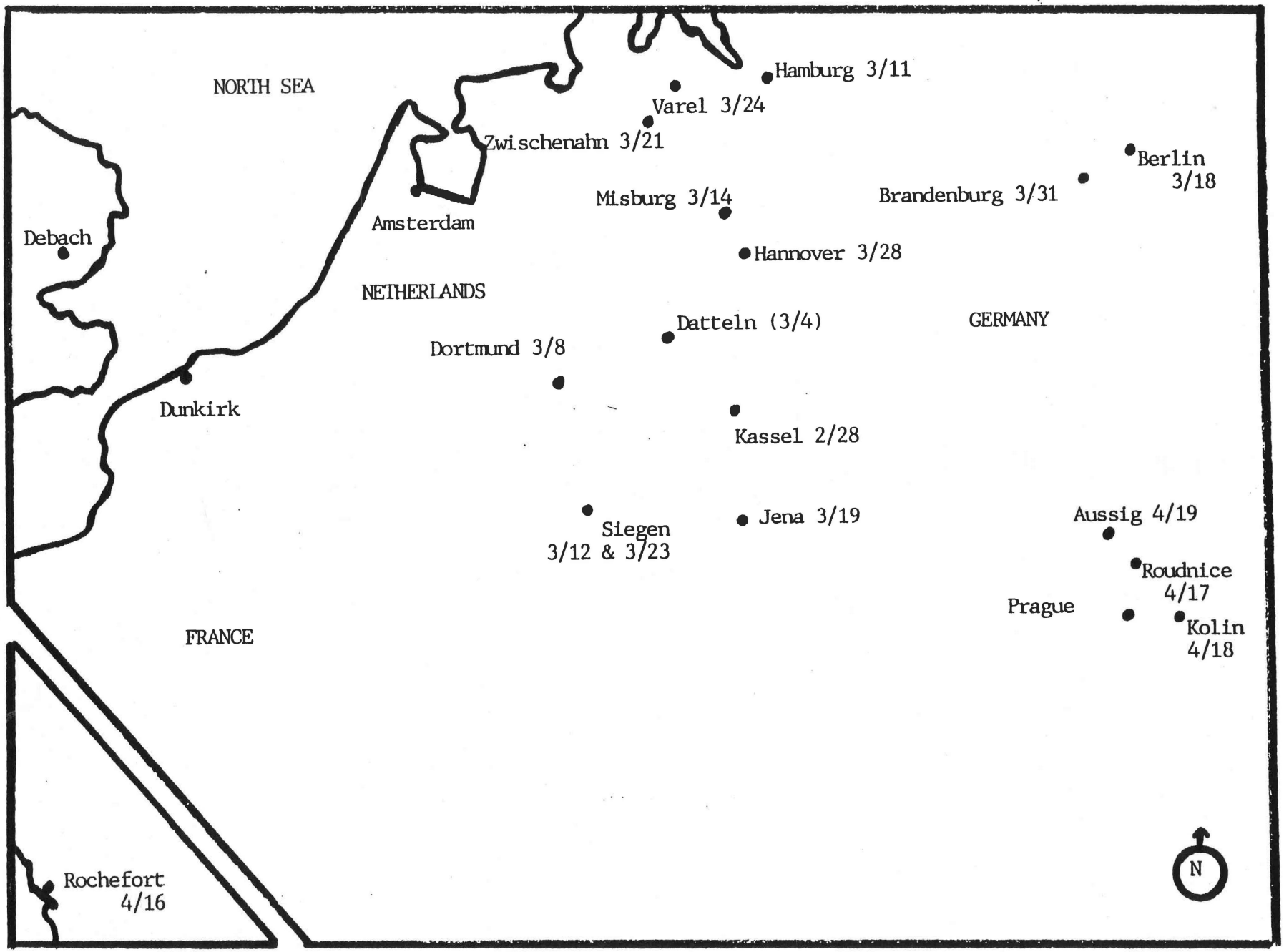


#28 Target Unknown. Photo obtained from Base Photo Lab.



#29 Phil Pettit's P-51 as seen from our aircraft.

LAST MISSIONS (MAP III)



(2/28/45 - 5/8/45)

Scale: 1 cm = 25 miles

VII. Flight Home

Gus truly said it well: "I never saw a hero. I never saw a coward. I never saw anyone refuse to go. I never saw anyone bust a gut to go." But now it was time to say good-bye to Britain and make our way home. Immediately following the completion of our combat tour, we had all sent telegrams home to our folks. (See Appendix 5.) We now were interested in returning to America as soon as possible. When we were offered a B-24 that was being returned to the States, we jumped at the chance. The craft was in rather poor shape and even painted black, but she looked good to us. We did notice that the plane's mainline drain valves were leaking. But we were not about to delay our return home by waiting for a replacement aircraft. We put soap on the valves. We took her up. The soap held. Off we went for the good old U.S.A.

Unfortunately the plane required only a skeleton crew. Our gunners had to be left behind. Adlai at first refused to accept the situation. "I brought them here. And I want to take them home." But he was given a direct order and the promise that the gunners would not be stranded in England. They were to be given transport home as soon as possible.
We took off from Britain on June 13, 1945.

We carried several passengers: a couple of B-17 pilots, a glider pilot, two captains, and a rank-happy major. This major could not use his rank once we were in the air. This he learned the hard way. The major was at first on the flight deck where it was warm and very nice riding. Other passengers were in the waist where it was very cold and quite uncomfortable. It was decided that the passengers should take turns on the flight deck. The major said that he was not going to ride in the waist until the NCOs, i.e., Pick and Snuffy, took their turns in the waist. He got very smart and referred to his rank. Pick and Snuffy

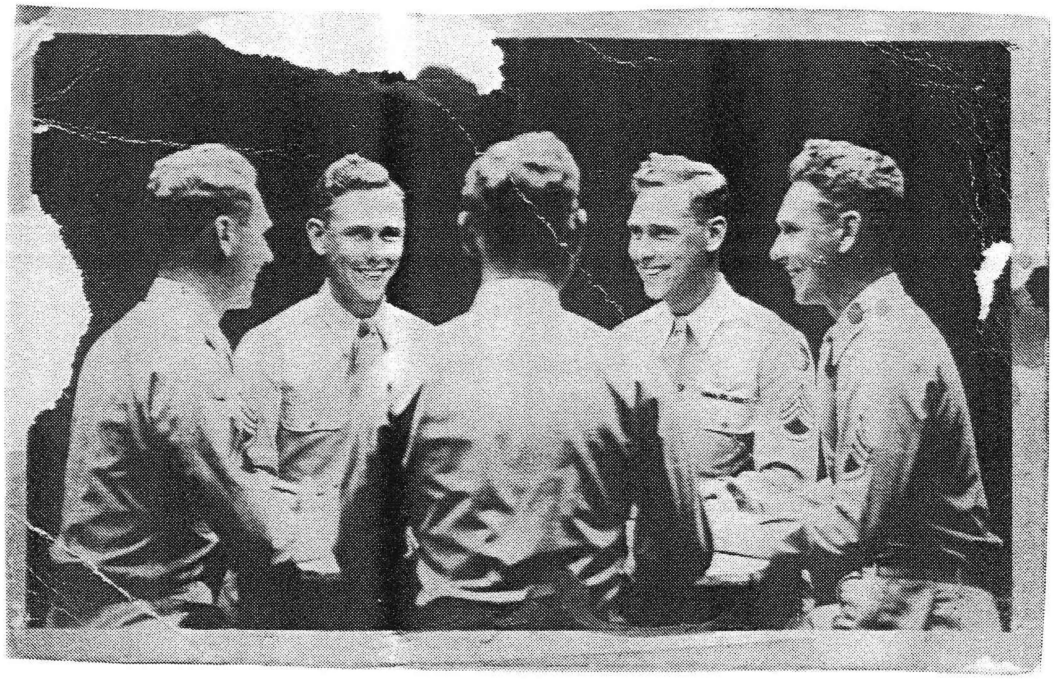
reported this to Jack and Adlai. "No one on the crew had ever pulled rank on anyone else. Maybe it was because we respected one another." Our pilot went back and told the major in no uncertain terms that we all respected his rank, but he had no authority in the operation of the airplane. The NCOs were crewmen with military duties to perform. The major was to get to the waist. He did so. Others were now able to come up and get warm. The major was by now too hot to get cold. The man never mentioned his rank again. The other officer-passengers were pilots and highly amused by this ground officer's behavior. In fact it was they who first suggested that we crack the bomb bay whenever the major was in the waist to help cool him down.

Adali and Jack had great fun pulling the legs of these fellow pilots. Adlai told them that the entire crew was cross-trained and could perform any other man's job. Gene was then placed at the controls and briefly flew the plane. Norm was then set at the controls. Gene had had some pilot training while Norm was able to keep the plane in level flight only. But the other pilots were amazed at the crew's seeming ability to do it all.

The flight turned out to be great fun. We knew that we would be broken up as a crew upon our return to the States. We fully expected to be soon training on B-29s and sent to the Pacific. Thus we decided to make the most of our last few days together. From Britain, we flew to Iceland. Viewing the Midnight Sun in the Icelandic capital was a rare treat. We spent three days on the island as we were weathered in. Norm remembers sleeping on the flight deck in order to safe-guard the plane. Stepp turned this dead time into profit. He won some $600 by playing poker with the local troops. That was a small fortune in those days. From Iceland, we flew to Goose Bay, Labrador. What a barren place to be stationed!

From there, we flew on to Bradley Field, Connecticut. We arrived on

June 18, 1945. We were soon granted thirty-day leave. When we departed from Bradley Field, we were no longer fellow crew members. The emotional roller coaster of the departure is something that words can not express. The flight of the "Peoria Belle" was over.



#30 Picture of Lew Stead taken in a House of Mirrors shortly after our return to the States.

Conclusion

As the reader can readily see, this booklet is no "war story" or a tale inspired by personal vanity. This is simply our story. We are today grandfathers giving a truthful message to our families. It is to be sure an insufficient tribute to those who shared our adventures in the 493rd but who failed to return. In a sense this booklet is a memorial to them all. We truly entered military service as untried youths and left as men who had answered their generation's call to arms. We make no claim to uniqueness or the performance of superhuman deeds. Yet we were there, not as mere witnesses but as participants in the greatest military campaign that the world had ever seen.

Upon our return to America we scattered about the nation to our families. By train, by car, or by bus we returned home——be it to a smalltown house, to a city apartment, or to a country farmhouse. Some returned to the wives that they had left behind in the unspoken fear of never seeing again. Our parents greeted us with pride. In a strange twist of fate, Norman returned home to his parents on June 23, 1945. Before going overseas, he had promised his father that he would see him on his next birthday——June 23. Lucky call!

What a mixture of pride in victory, of joy in survival, and of sadness for our losses. How can one balance one family's loss of a son killed during training with another family's relief when a son returned from a P-O-W camp? One simply does not even try to calculate such a balance sheet. One simply records the events knowing how easily all of us could have been war casualties who failed to return at all.

We all took up careers and lives interupted by the War. Eventually we became businessmen, farmers, carpenters, career military men, et al. And how about the fate of our eleventh crew member, our mascot Two-Rad? Actually he came close to being lost. Once after returning from

a mission, Pick realized that he had left the dog in the interrogation room. Fortunately a major came by and had the locked room re-opened and the dog retrieved. Pick thanked the major for his trouble but the major (a pilot) said, "I know what that dog must mean to you and your crew!" Two-Rad's most dangerous encounter in fact occured after V-E Day when one member of the crew wondered if it would not be appropriate to take the stuffed dog out behind the barracks to shoot him. Pick said, "No way!" And so Two-Rad survived the War. Luckily for the crew, especially Snuffy as he wanted to bring back his watch through customs. Snuffy's and others' watches were inserted into Two-Rad. At the customs post in the States, the officials got a kick out of the crew's stuffed dog. They even passed him among themselves. Once through customs, the watches were carefully retrieved. Today, Two-Rad is alive and well and a life-long member of the Pickstone household.

But what about the "Peoria Belle" herself? Actually the crew knows her fate as well. In 1951, Norm was severely injured in an accident at Mitchell Field, New York. While in the hospital, someone said that a captain was looking for him. It was Jack. "It was the best medicine I could have had. Jack then told me that he had flown a surplus B-17 to Kingman, Arizona. Numerous surplus aircraft were sent there. It was great fun to run the plane into the sand. It was fun until Jack watched the "Peoria Belle" being flown into Kingman and sent to the scrap pile. 'It was a hell of a feeling seeing her end up there.'"

Over the years, various members of the crew ran across each other. Today all surviving members are in contact with the rest and see one another whenever possible. They have come to realize that the "Peoria Belle" was more than the metal, wire, bolts, etc. that go into the making of such an aircraft. No more is the flag merely a colored pattern of thread is the "Peoria Belle" merely such materials. No, the "Peoria Belle" is forever alive to her crew.

It is not how often we meet or even if our personal interests now diverge.

This feeling transcends all political or social differences. No, not even death can break these bonds. It takes only the passing of a plane overhead to jar our individual memories of those youthful days. Some would call them our "glory days". We are forever bound as the proud crew of the "Peoria Belle".

#31 Norm on the right with his friend Dewey Rigger, (left). Photo taken shortly after Norm's return to the States.

List of Maps

Early Missions (Map I) page 41

Crash Landings in France (Map II) page 63

Last Missions (Map III) page 73

Photo Credits

	Photo Numbers
Carlyle Bradbury	16, 33
Ruth Martin	17
Adlai Munday	32
Norman Pickstone	13, 14, 15, 28, 31, 34, 35
Lew Stead	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30
Bill Stepp	8, 11

Appendix 1.

H E A D Q U A R T E R S
WALLA WALLA ARMY AIR FIELD
WASHINGTON

CT/JEP/gk

20 October 1944.

SUBJECT: Letter of Commendation.

TO : All Concerned.

1. An award is made to the following members of Crews #230, #245 and #254 for being the three (3) outstanding crews throughout the Training Program at this field for the period 6 August 1944 to 20 October 1944:

Crew #230

Pilot	2d Lt.	Richard L. Johnson	0-2058207
Co-Pilot	2d Lt.	Raymond M. Powers	0-778354
Navigator	2d Lt.	Leonard A. Caplan	0-2068599
Bombardier	2d Lt.	Sidney M. Schultz	0-785219
Engineer	Cpl	Edward G. LaPointe	32785610
Radio Operator	Cpl	Joseph B. Rice	14064616
Gunner	Cpl	Howard H. Smith	39285856
Gunner	Pfc	John A. Hoffman	42059749
Gunner	Pfc	Harry E. Walmer	35925193
Gunner	Pfc	Russell A. Brant	35924810

Crew #245

Pilot	2d Lt.	Adlai S. Munday	0-721173
Co-Pilot	2d Lt.	Stahley J. Martin	0-741924
Navigator	2d Lt.	Robert E. Gaustad	0-2068839
Bombardier	2d Lt.	Carlyle E. Bradbury	0-785161
Engineer	Cpl	Norman R. Pickstone	33671618
Radio Operator	Cpl	William H. Stepp, Jr.	35769458
Gunner	Cpl	Lewis L. Stead	31304371
Gunner	Pfc	Robert E. Sumnicht	36836981
Gunner	Pfc	Eugene W. Coughlin	39721263
Gunner	Pfc	Gerald L. Doll	37538727

Crew #254

Pilot	1st Lt.	Tom E. Marchbanks	O-669752
Co-Pilot	F/O	Roland O. Litz	T-4277
Navigator	F/O	Robert C. Galloway	T-131829
Bombardier	F/O	Albert C. Beaty	T-5590
Engineer	Cpl	Claude W. Tracey	6993878
Radio Operator	Cpl	Frank Williams	39136986
Gunner	Pfc	Richard A. Doran	39705834
Gunner	Pfc	Francis J. Gardipee	36842228
Gunner	Cpl	Charles Swjantek	33691633
Gunner	Pfc	Chester S. Buck	31373836

2. These crews have consistently displayed a keen interest and conscientiousness in the many problems encountered. The qualities of leadership and ability, as displayed by the above crew members, have been of great value in perfecting teamwork among the activities of the various crews throughout the Training Program. In addition, their devotion to duty and efforts have made these crews outstanding examples to all with whom they have trained.

R. Wade

D. WADE,
Colonel, Air Corps,
Commanding.

R E S T R I C T E D

HEADQUARTERS
493RD BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H)
APO 559

7 May 1945

SUBJECT: Performance of Combat Crew Personnel.

TO : Whom it may concern.

1. The following information is submitted with reference to First Lieutenant ALAN C. KELLY, 0731173, a combat crew member of this organization, who has been relieved from combat due to administrative reasons.

a. Combat experience:

DATE	GROUP MISSION	INDIVIDUAL MISSION	TARGET	TIME
15 Dec 44	95	1	Hannover, Ger	6:30
23 Dec 44	94	2	Homberg, Ger	6:05
23 Dec 44	96	3	Ixlich, RR Bridge, Coblenz, Ger	6:10
29 Dec 44	98	4	Frankfurt, M/Y, Ger	7:00
30 Dec 44	100	5	Kassel, M/Y, Ger	7:00
31 Dec 44	100A	6	Kirburg, Ger	7:50
7 Jan 45	100C	7	Paderborn, Ger	6:15
14 Jan 45	102	8	Derben, Ger	7:45
21 Jan 45	105	9	Limbeim, Ger	7:40
9 Feb 45	111	10	Hamuter, M/Y, Ger	7:00
14 Feb 45	112	11	Chemnitz, Ger	8:10
15 Feb 45	113	12	Cottbus, Ger	8:40
23 Feb 45	118	13	Kitzingen MR Bridge, Ger	8:10
26 Feb 45	122	14	Kassel, M/Y, Ger	6:50
4 Mar 45	125	15	Recall	6:20
9 Mar 45	127	16	Berlin, Ger	7:20
11 Mar 45	129	17	Hamm, Ger	6:40
12 Mar 45	130	18	Siegen, Ger	6:35
14 Mar 45	131	19	Kassel, Ger	6:45
18 Mar 45	134	20	Berlin, Ger	7:30
19 Mar 45	135	21	Jena, Ger	8:45
21 Mar 45	136	22	Zwischenahn, Ger	5:50
22 Mar 45	138	23	Siegen, Ger	6:30
26 Mar 45	139	24	Varel, A/F, Ger	6:00
28 Mar 45	140	25	Hannover, Ger	7:15
31 Mar 45	142	26	Brandenburg, Ger	8:25
16 Apr 45	146	27	Rochefort, Fr	6:35
17 Apr 45	147	28	Roudnice, Czech.	8:45
18 Apr 45	150	29	Kolin, Czech.	8:40
19 Apr 45	150	30	Aussig, Czech	8:45
			TOTAL TIME	215:25

b. Decorations awarded:
Air Medal per GO No. 5 , 3rd Air Division, 4 January 1945.
1st OLC per GO No. 114, 3rd Air Division, 18 February 1945.
2nd OLC per GO No. 576, 3rd Air Division, 27 March 1945.
3rd OLC per GO No. 641, 3rd Air Division, 14 March 1945.
4th OLC per GO No. 803, 3rd Air Division, 21 April 1945.

c. Tumor of performance: Excellent
d. Crew specialty: Pilot
e. The following duty assignment is recommended:
Instructor Pilot

Appendix 3.

HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES STRATEGIC AIR FORCES IN EUROPE (MAIN)
APO 633

27/1/45
(DATE)

SUBJECT: Pass for Paris Area

TO : WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RATIONS RECEIVED
30 JAN 1945

STEAD I.L. SGT. 31304371 493 B.G
(Name) (Rank) (ASN) (Organization)

The above named person has just returned from a "Missing in Act: status, and is authorized to be in the Paris area. He is bille at the Hotel Francia, 100 Rue Lafayette, Paris (PW & X Det, Off: of the Director of Intelligence, Hq US Strategic Air Forces in Europe). He will not be able to comply with existing uniform regulations due to his recent return to duty.

For the Commanding General:

R. E. FECTEAU
Captain, AGD,
Asst Adj General

RUTHERFORD P. TODD
MAJOR A.G.
Hdqrs A.F.

Appendix 4.

HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES STRATEGIC AIR FORCES IN EUROPE (MAIN)
APO 633

FEB. 24, 1945
(Date)

SUBJECT: Pass for Paris Area

TO : Whom It May Concern

LEWIS L. STEAD. SGT. 31304371 493rd. B.Gp c
(Name) (Rank) (ASN) (Organization)

The above named person has just returned from a "Missing in Acti status, and is authorized to be in the Paris area. He is billet at the Hotel Francia, 100 Rue Lafayette, Paris, (PW & X Det, Office of the Director of Intelligence, Hq, US Strategic Air Forces in Europe). He will not be able to comply with existing uniform regulations due to his recent return to duty.

For the Commanding General:

R. E. FECTEAU
Captain, AGD
Asst Adj General

Appendix 5.

CLASS OF SERVICE

This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.

WESTERN UNION

A. N. WILLIAMS
PRESIDENT

1201

SYMBOLS
DL = Day Letter
NL = Night Letter
LC = Deferred Cable
NLT = Cable Night Letter
Ship Radiogram

The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination

BAT17 INTL=CD SANSORIGINE VIA WUCABLES 19 MAY 7 1120P

LC MGS A E STEAD=

38 PROSPECTST HOPEDALE (MASS)=

MISSION COMPLETED BE HOME SOON HAPPY MOTHERS DAY LOVE=

LEWIS STEAD=

848A=

38

TE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

Appendix 6

Individual Biographies

First-Lieutenant Adlai Munday (O-721173) was our pilot. He was born on October 18, 1920 in DuQuoin, Illinois. He was graduated from Peoria Central High School in June of 1938. He also attended the University of Illinois before the War. Before entering the military service, Adlai worked as an inspector of M4 Tank Transmissions under the authority of the U.S. Civil Service Ordinance Department in Peoria. Inducted into the military in January of 1943, Adlai was sent to Jefferson Barracks, St. Louis, Missouri as an Air Corps Cadet. He also served as a supply officer while stationed in Columbia, Missouri.

With several other airmen, Adlai helped form a dance band. He was one of the singers. The band leader was Jack LaSalle, a saxman formerly with the Glen Gray Orchestra. Adlai received further military training in San Antonio, Texas, Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and Independence, Kansas. A bout of flu caused him to spend an extra month in basic flight training. He clocked ninety-one hours flight time including seventeen and a half hours of instrument time. While at Independence, Munday had been a "cadet colonel".

In April of 1944, Adlai Munday was commissioned a lieutenant at Pampa, Texas. He received B-24 training at Libral, Kansas (106 hours). It was during this time that Adlai's younger brother was killed while flying a P-39 in California. With his own training now complete, Adlai was sent on to LeMoore, California. There while standing in a line, he met Jack Martin. They struck up a conversation and decided to fly together if possible.

Adlai is married to Dorothy Munday. They have three children and five grandchildren. After the War, Munday worked as a long-lines test board operator for AT&T. He later managed the record department of a music store. In 1952, he began working for AC Sparkplug Division of GMC in outside sales. In October of 1980, he received early retirement and presently lives in Des Moines, Iowa.

Members of the crew freely admit their continued admiration for Adlai's flying skills and his leadership. As Gus says, "This guy was sharp. He was cool and efficient. I can remember several instances in which I was glad he was in the number one seat."

First-Lieutenant Stanley Jackson Martin, Jr. (O-741924) was our co-pilot. He was nicknamed "Jack". He was born on April 18, 1921 in Marshall, Saline County, Missouri. Jack's father worked for the power company and was killed when Jack was four or five years old. His mother, Florence L. Martin, was a Chief Operator for Southwest Bell. Jack was graduated from Marshall High School in 1939. He then went to work for the Don Short Funeral Home. He joined the National Guard in Marshall in December of 1940. Jack was later stationed in Little Rock, Arkansas.

After two years in the Army, he volunteered for pilot training. He was graduated from pilot school in April of 1943 in Yuma, Arizona. Jack then went to Kirkland, New Mexico for B-24 training which lasted until March of 1944. After the War, Jack remained in the military. While stationed on Guam, he was the commanding officer's personal pilot. He retired on September 30, 1965. He and his wife Ruth settled in Greeley, Colorado. They had married in Victorville, California during the War. They had no children. Jack was graduated from what is now the University of Northern Colorado in May of 1969. Jack spent his leisure time fishing and hunting. His health began to fail. Jack Martin died on August 14, 1979. The crew's memories of Jack can be summed up by Gus's comment that there was "never a dull moment around Jack".

First-Lieutenant Robert E. Gaustad (O-206838) was the navigator. He was born on August 6, 1918 in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. His father, Soli Gaustad, was a salesman. His mother was a housewife. "Gus" has two brothers. He was graduated from John H. Reagan High School in Houston, Texas in 1934. Before the War, Gus worked in management for a major motor carrier. He was inducted into the

service in Houston in April of 1942. Gus was stationed for two years at Foster Field in Victoria, Texas. He worked with an M.P. squadron doing clerical work. Gus then did his aviation training in Washington, Texas, and California.

Gus married his wife Betty in June of 1941. They have four children and five grandchildren. While the crew of the "Peoria Belle" trained in Walla Walla, Betty joined Gus. They lived off the Base. Gus flew sixteen missions with the crew in Europe because his injury caused him to be hospitalized for a while. Much of the personal information in this booklet comes from Gus. His knack for turning a phrase can be seen in his self-description: "Nickname Gus. My family calls me Bob; the mailman calls me occupant; the bill collectors call me frequently. The chief job of the navigator was to come up with an acceptable excuse when you got lost."

Adlai says that at first when he realized that Gus was a Texan he feared he would turn out to be a bragging windbag. But Adlai soon learned that Gus was a true gentleman. Gus claims that after years of being stationed on miserable bases in Texas that he had learned to hate Texas himself!

Second-Lieutenant Carlyle E. Bradbury (O-785161) was the bombardier. He was nicknamed "Brad" and "Porky". He was born on August 2, 1919 in Portland, Oregon. He has four brothers and sisters. Brad was graduated from high school in January of 1939. He then worked for the Bonneville Power Administration. Then, ironically, he worked for the Boeing Corporation building B-17s. Drafted on March 4, 1941 before America's entry into the War, Brad was less than pleased: "I went along kicking and screaming all the way. I was already married. There was no war. Besides I was a Republican." Released from service in November of 1941 when all married men were detached, Brad was recalled on April 21, 1942. He served as a truck driver with an artillery unit. When volunteers were called for, Brad signed

up for combat duty in the Air Corps.

Brad received technical training at the University of Syracuse, New York and gunnery training in Las Vegas, Nevada. Bombardier training was given in Victorville, California. Commissioned in August of 1944, Brad was sent to Walla Walla. Because of his husky built and his jolly disposition the crew often referred to him as "Porky".

After suffering injuries from the crash of January of 1945, Brad was sent to a military hospital in California. He was taught to read lips and needed a hearing aid. Brad was given a medical disability discharge in August of 1945. He returned to work for the Bonneville Power Administration, but found that he was no longer satisified being an auto mechanic. He eventually began a lifelong career with a Savings and Loan. He began as a chief appraiser and then worked in branch management. Brad retired in 1977. He and his wife Marion now live in Canbury, Oregon. They have two children and four grandchildren.

T/Sgt. Norman R. Pickstone (33671618) was the flight engineer and a gunner. He was born on a farm near Fayette City, Pennsylvania on September 30, 1924. His father, Joseph S. Pickstone, was a coalminer and a farmer. His mother, Mary Ann Curran Pickstone, was a housewife. He has three brothers and three sisters. Norman was graduated from Perry Township High School in 1943. He traded places with a friend so that he would be drafted early. His friend was later drafted and received a 100% disability from wounds received in Italy.

Norman entered the service in April of 1943 at Fort Meade, Maryland. He did his basic training at Greensboro, North Carolina and then went to aircraft mechanic (AM) school at Keesler Field, Mississippi in 1943. His engine specialist (R-1830) training was in Detroit, Michigan in 1944. He then went to gunnery school at Tyndall Field, Florida.

During this military training phase, Norman travelled about the nation. Being from Pennsylvania he was unfamiliar with the social customs of the South. "In January of 1944, I got on a bus in Richmond, Virginia. There was a black lady sitting just a little behind the middle of the bus. All the other seats were filled except for the one next to her. I started to sit down when the driver told the elderly lady to get out of the seat and go to the back of the bus. I would have two seats and she would be standing. I told the driver that it was okay. I could sit there beside her. He said no. He said, "Lady, get to the rear of the bus." She replied, "The nerve of some people!" He retorted, "It's not nerve. It's the law." She retreated to the back and the journey continued. That kind of stuff did not sit well with me. But at the time that is how it was. I am glad this behavior would no longer be tolerated.

Norman joined the crew in August of 1944. He and Bill Stepp were the first enlisted men assigned to the crew as Adlai and Jack were its first officers. Norman was nicknamed "Pick" by the crew.

Norman remained in the service after the War. He was at first an aircraft mechanic and later a ground safety specialist. He was stationed at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (1947-1950), at Cleveland, Ohio (1950-1951), at Mitchell Field, New York (1951-1952), and at Floyd Bennett, New York (1952-1954). He then served a tour of duty at Naha, Okinawa (1954-1956). He then was sent to Wright-Patterson near Dayton, Ohio (1956-1957). He was medically discharged in 1957 because of a service-related injury received in 1951.

After being discharged, Norman was graduated from Fairmont State College (Farimont, WV) with a BA in Education. He also did his graduate work at West Virginia University. Norman began teaching for Monongalia County, West Virginia in 1961. For over twenty-five years he taught at Arnettsville School.

In 1969, he settled in Rivesville, West Virginia. For a number of years, he served as chief of the local volunteer fire department. He remains a certified fire-safety instructor. Norman is also a member of the Rivesville City Council. Retired from teaching in 1988, Norman remains active in church and community affairs. He is also an avid fisherman and a gardener. Married to the former Mary Jane Riggi, Norm has three children and four grandchildren. Gus remembers Norm as "a sort of quiet, mind-your-own business type and quite efficient".

T/Sgt. William H. Stepp, Jr. (35769458) was the radio operator and a gunner. Being from West Virginia, he was nicknamed "Snuffy". He was born on April 5, 1925 in Borderland, Mingo County, West Virginia. His parents, William and Emma, were merchants. He has six brothers and sisters. Snuffy was graduated from Kermit High School, Kermit, West Virginia in May of 1943. He worked as a salesclerk until being inducted into the service in July of 1943. at Fort Thomas, Kentucky. Basic training was in Biloxi, Mississippi. Bill went to radio operators' school in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Gunnery school was in Yuma, Arizona.

After the crew broke up, Snuffy went to Florida for a rest. He was discharged in December of 1945. Now semi-retired, Snuffy still works occasionally as a merchant and a businessman. He also did some home construction. Married to Gene, Snuffy has six children and six grandchildren. He lives in Jackson, Ohio.

S/Sgt. Lewis L. Stead (31304371) was a gunner. Gus describes Lew as "dependable" and "a good poker player". Lew was born in Rugby, England and came to the United States when he was four years old. He was raised in the town of Hopedale, Massachusetts, the home of the Draper Corporation, then the largest manufacturer of cotton textiles looms in the world. He was educated in Hopedale's public schools and was graduated from high school in 1940 with

honors. He had been president of his class, captain of the basketball team, and also played tennis and baseball. After graduation, he attended Boston Technical School where he majored in machine construction and tool design. After a period of industrial deferments, he entered the service in March of 1944. He was first assinged to infantry special training in Denver, Colorado and later attended gunnery school in Las Vegas, Nevada. After a short stay in Lemoore Field, California, Lew joined the crew in Walla Walla as the ball-turret gunner. He now lives in North Uxbridge, Massachusetts.

S/Sgt. Robert E. Sumnicht (36836981) was a gunner. He was nicknamed "Nose". He was born on September 12, 1925 in Paynette, Wisconsin. His parents, Frank and Grace, were farmers. His mother died when he was eight years old. He has five brothers and sisters. Nose was graduated from Columbus High School in June of 1943. He went directly into the service. He was inducted in Madison, Wisconsin. His training was in Biloxi, Mississippi and San Marcos Gunnery School in Harlingen, Texas. From there he was sent to Walla Walla.

After the War, he spent time in the Reserves. He was recalled to active duty during the Korean War. In 1950-1951, he trained overseas crews at Nellis Air Force Base (Nevada) and at Randolph Air Force Base (Texas). Returning to civilian life, Nose became a carpenter's apprentice in 1952. By 1962, he owned his own business. He is still working. Married to Eileen, Nose has three children and six grandchildren. He lives in Mt. Horeb, Wisconsin.

Nose had been so eager to join the service that his father had to sign for him to enter the military. As Gus said: "This was one of the happiest guys I ever knew. It did not seem to bother him when the Germans were shooting at him. Maybe it was becasue they were his kinsfolk."

S/Sgt. Eugene W. Coughlin (39721263) was a gunner and later our togalier. Gene was born on February 10, 1918 in the Detroit Lakes area of Minnesota.

He has four brothers and sisters. He was graduated from high school in 1936. Gene then went to Concordia College in Moorehead, Minnesota and later the Los Angeles Conservatory. He bacame a professional bass singer getting paid sixteen dollars a song.

Coughlin entered the service in October of 1943 at Fort MacArthur, CA. He did his basic at Buckley Field, Colorado. He went to gunnery school in Yuma, Arizona. He also had some pilot training. Gene's most vivid memory of the Walla Walla training was the standing order given to all crews that no one was to urinate over the city of Walla Walla. Evidently the local citizens thought this was a major threat to their well-being.

Discharged in October of 1945, Gene went to Los Angeles to continue his musical education on a scholarship. He was offered a job with the Walt Disney Company but declined. He even declined an offer by the Army to accept a commission in the infantry! He did re-enlist and did public relations work for the Sixth Army. Gene appeared in many early TV shows in the San Francisco area. He also began singing in the Army Field Band as a baritone soloist. He later transferred to Washington, D.C. In 1974, he helped set up the Armed Forces Bicentennial Band and Chorus as a command sargeant-major. In January of 1977, Gene retired from the Army as the associate band leader after serving in the military for thirty-one years. He presently lives in Baltimore, Maryland with his wife Ethel. Gene has three children, six grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Crew members at first had no idea that Gene was a professional singer. The first time Lew saw Gene he was doing his musical scales and his "me-me-me" routine. Lew turned to Norm saying, "Look at that silly S.O.B.!" Norm replied, "Sh-sh! He's one of our gunners." "Well, in that case," Lew conceded, "he's our S.O.B."

Coughlin's most memorable mission occured when he was drafted to fly with

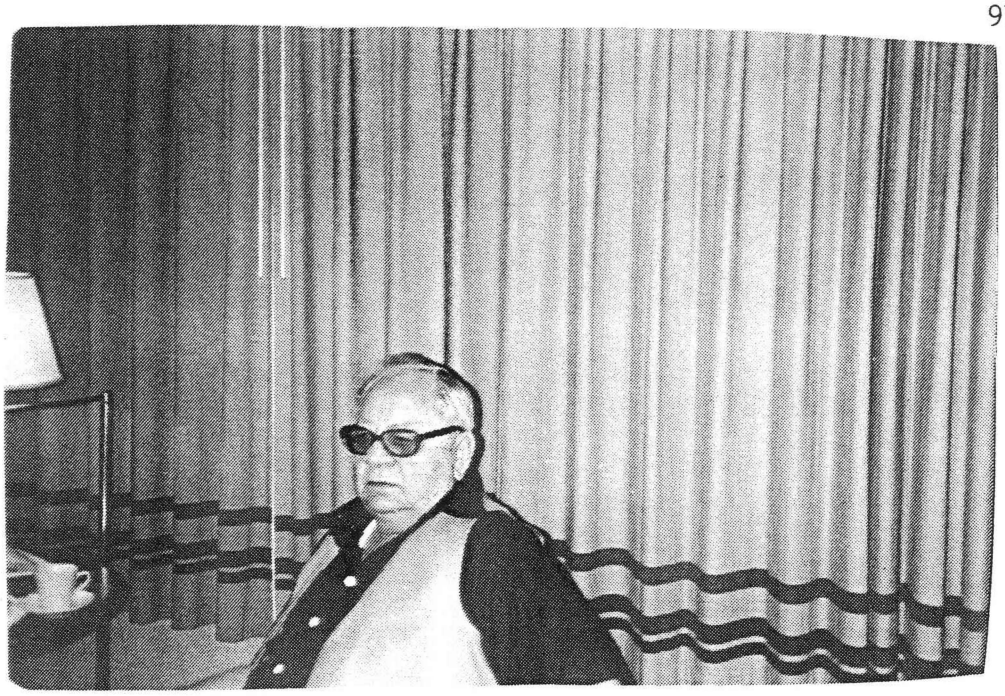
another crew. Gene was awakened at 3 AM and told he was to fly as togalier with a crew he did not know. It was a new crew without any combat experience. After Gene had dropped their bombs that day and the pilot had taken control of the plane, it was discovered that one bomb was hung up. Gene's oxygen bottle ran out of gas just as a screw fuse went out. Fortunately the crew was able to plug him in. All this time the command pilot was ordering the plane to close the bombay or to get out of formation. Finally the bomb came loose and dropped. As Gene says there was just "no place to go. And the sons of bitches were shooting at you at the same time."

S/Sgt. Gerald Doll (3758727) was a gunner. He was born on March 27, 1925 in Ellenwood, Kansas. His parents were farmers. He had eight brothers and sisters. Gus says that Doll was "quiet, strong, and dependable". The crew affectionally called him the "Ox" because of his great physical strength. He was graduated from high school in Buskton, Kansas in 1943. He worked on the family farm until inducted into the service in August of 1943 at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He was discharged in October of 1945 at Lincoln, Nebraska.

After the War, Gerald went into the plumbing business. He later ran a gas station and finally worked in the oilfields and became a crew chief. Married in 1951, Doll and his wife Rita had four children and one grandchild. He loved to play baseball and basketball. He seemed to remain in good health. He had just completed an oil job when Gerald died suddenly on November 2, 1981. Rita lives in Claflin, Kansas. Rita writes that: "Everything he did he did well. He was a devoted father and family man." When all is said and done, what higher tribute can be paid any man than that?

#32 Dorothy and Adlai Munday. They were married in Walla Walla.

#33 Carlyle Bradbury and his wife Marion. We called him Brad or Porky.

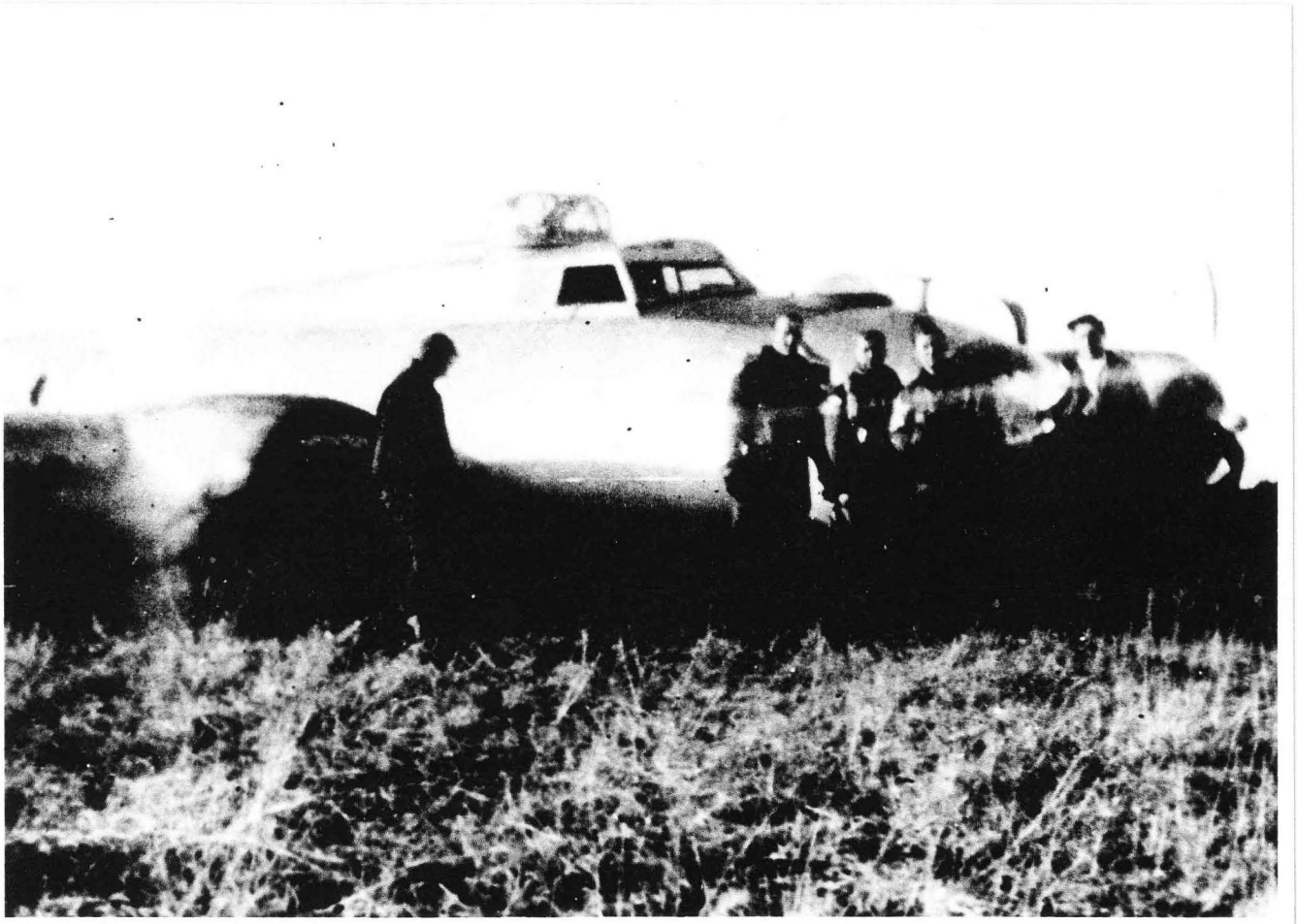


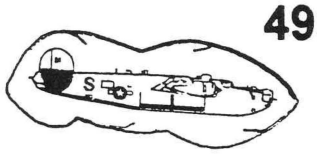
#34 Gene Coughlin ("Pop"), photo taken while Gene was visiting Norman in West Virginia.

#35 Norman R. Pickstone and Two-Rad.

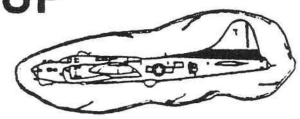
Postscript

An interesting aspect of this booklet is the fact that no one crew member seems to think that his own personal role was of salient importance. Adlai speaks of Jack or Snuffy. Lew talks about Pick or Ox. Gus writes of Nose, Gene, or Brad. A crew member fails to mention an incident that reflects well on himself. Yet several others recall the incident well. These men unwittingly collaborate the conclusion that any reader will make: The crew of the "Peoria Belle" was not the average, non-descript group that its members indicate. This was an exceptionally skilled group of airmen, proud upholders of America's finest military traditions.





493rd BOMB GROUP
Debach, England
1944 - 1945



Jan 31 2001

Lt Munday Sir!

See what I mean, old habits are hard to broke.

anyway it was such a pleasure to hear from you a few days back and sure brings a lot of old memories.

Inclosed are 4 of the best Photos I could get copied

You may know some of the crew in that one Photo. this mis hap was on Feb 15-1945 and the mission was to Diedson. the Crash was close to a village called Mirville France.

I hope you enjoy the Photos, they are yours to keep. Thank you for Calling, we will keep in touch.

Best to you always Sincerely Art,